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## David Lipscomb's Doctrine of the Church

Herman L. Barnett

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Name of candidate:

Herman Leslie Barnett

Oral examination:

Date June 29, 1956

Committee:

Ronald E. Osborn, Chairman

Robert Tolias

O. J. Shelton

.....

.....

Thesis title:

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Major Professor Ronald E. Osborn

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DAVID LIPSCOMB'S  
DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

by

Herman L. Barnett

(3)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## PREFACE

David Lipscomb, editor of the Gospel Advocate for almost half a century, was a man of wide influence. He was intensely devoted to the cause of Christ. In the estimation of his admirers he "had a keener and deeper insight to the meaning of the Holy Scriptures and of God's dealings with the race than any other one man in all Christendom."<sup>1</sup> Though such a judgment is open to question, the man becomes a fit subject for such a study as we have attempted to make.

Today there is considerable discussion relative to the church. To strengthen the possibility of a more complete union of the followers of the Christ, men are striving for a better understanding of the church as it was and is in the mind of God. To that end Lipscomb's doctrine of the church may materially assist.

To the great majority of Lipscomb's views I subscribe whole-heartedly, yet I have endeavored at all times to allow him to speak for himself. I have tried hard not to force him into a mould of my own thinking.

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<sup>1</sup>C. E. W. Dorris, A Commentary on The Gospel by Mark, (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Company, 1938), Preface.

See also a similar statement made by I. B. Bradley in his introduction to David Lipscomb's A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, Vol. V. I Thessalonians -- Philemon, (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Company, 1942).

Lipscomb belonged to the second generation of the "disciples of Christ" in America, that body of people that had come into being with their acceptance of the plea to "restore New Testament Christianity to the world." That plea had been presented in the early part of the nineteenth century by such men as Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott and others in an attempt to get back behind the narrow and divisive dogmas and creeds of men and unite all the professed followers of the Christ on the broad platform of Christian truth presented in the New Testament. Approval was widespread, resulting in what is quite generally known among Disciples as the "restoration movement." Those identifying themselves with the movement were variously referred to as "Reformers," "disciples (or, Disciples) of Christ," etc., their congregations as the "Christian Church," or the "church of Christ." They applied to themselves individually any of the titles found in the New Testament which designated the people of God, such as "disciples," "Christians," etc.

With the introduction of the Missionary Society and instrumental music in the worship the fellowship of the disciples of Christ was disrupted, the more conservative regarding this as a digression, a trend away from God. Lipscomb set himself firmly in opposition to these "innovations," and the result is that many of his ideas about the church come to us "out of the heat of conflict." This explains why these things were introduced into this discussion. It seemed necessary in order to bring forth clearly the principle that was involved.

David Lipscomb made few major changes in his teachings throughout his long life. This fact is mentioned, not to deprecate change for change is often good, but to indicate the kind of man he was. He seldom published anything of importance without having given a great deal of thought to it. He often failed to arrive at a conclusion and never hesitated to say so, but when he did declare himself, it was a carefully considered observation. Herein lies one of the greatest values in a study of his works. Men might misunderstand him -- often did, but they could not justly accuse him of being self-contradictory or insincere. He believed what he wrote and wrote what he believed, but because of the great care which he exercised to teach only what he believed was the truth of God, he was very much the same Lipscomb in 1906 as when he first began to write in 1866. In 1867 he wrote:

There is but one influence in the universe that can elevate and permanently benefit man. That influence is embodied in the Gospel of the Son of God. But one set of instrumentalities that can apply those benefits to man's fallen condition, those that God has connected with the Gospel of his Son. There is but one institution that can benefit ruined man. That institution is the Church of the Living God.<sup>1</sup>

In 1868 he added: "We believe that Heaven's plan has never been changed in the least, without evils to the church and the world; culminating in corruption, and final infidelity re-

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<sup>1</sup>"The First Chapter of Romans," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 11 (March 14, 1867), 213.

sulting therefrom."<sup>1</sup> In 1869, introducing the new volume of the Gospel Advocate, he stated: "We shall compromise in no sense, the stern and strict line of demarcation God has drawn between his Church and the human religious organizations of earth."<sup>2</sup> And, we believe, compromise he never did!

In collecting the material contained herein, I have relied primarily on the original writings of David Lipscomb, particularly the Gospel Advocate, Volumes VIII through XV, XVIII - XXXIV, XLIII, XLIV, XLVIII and XLIX. However, a great deal of assistance has been obtained from the editorial work of J. W. Shepherd in the books Salvation From Sin, and A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles. No claim to exhaustiveness is made, but there has been an attempt to glean statements that are pertinent to the present discussions concerning ecumenicity.

Hence, after treating, in the Introduction, of Lipscomb's concept of God as Ruler of the universe, we have dealt in Chapter I with the establishment of the church. The church is the result of God's determination to restore man to his rightful position of submission to him and ruler of earth, which position was lost when he was enticed into sin. The principles laid down by Jesus Christ, God's Son, made effectual in the lives of men, accomplish the purpose of God. That all men might be prompted to submit to God it is essential that

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<sup>1</sup>"Missions of Divine Appointment," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 9 (February 27, 1868), 195.

<sup>2</sup>"The New Volume," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 1 (January 7, 1869), 2.

Christ's followers be united. To make such unity practicable there must be a suitable basis.

In Chapter II we see that the only basis Lipscomb found for unity was the recognition of Divine authority as it is made known to man in the New Testament. That which is authorized in the New Testament, either by command, approved example or necessary inference, must be the limit of man's religious faith.

Having found the basis for unity, there is developed in Chapter III Lipscomb's idea of the nature of the church, how churches are related, and how the church has appeared in history.

Finally, in Chapter IV, Lipscomb's views of how the church is organized and how it functions, with the emphasis on the function are given. The following words from Lipscomb, furnishing as they do a bird's-eye view of that which is to come, begin our study of his teachings concerning the church:

Our readers are well aware that we believe in the all-sufficiency of the church of God, for the full exercise of all the activities, talents, affections and means of every child of God, and for him to give fealty or service to another institution, is to desecrate that which God demands and to which he is entitled, and that which has been sacredly pledged to him, to uses vain and profane, and that such a course exhibits a lack of confidence in God and his appointments.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"New Publication," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 26 (June 26, 1873), 617.

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## INTRODUCTION

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

This, the starting point of God's revelation to man, is, without a doubt, also the starting point in David Lipscomb's doctrine of the church, for his concept of the church unmistakably has its foundation in his concept of God and his relationship to the universe. And this revelation of God and of the universe as a harmonious, completed cosmos was deemed by Lipscomb to be essential to a clear understanding of the church because, without it, no clear idea can be formed of the unity, true character, and work of God and of man's duty to him.<sup>1</sup> Lipscomb taught that

the Bible is the record of God's revelation of himself, his character, his work, his will and purposes concerning man; of man's origin and being, his spiritual duties, obligations to God, to his fellow-man, and to himself; of the character he should form; of his condition in relation to the world; and of his final everlasting destiny in the universe. . . . He (God) is revealed to us in the Bible in what he does as well as in what is said concerning him. To learn him, then, we must study God in what he is revealed as doing as well as in what is said of him; and to form a true estimate of God, we must study him in all his attributes and characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, Salvation from Sin, ed. J. W. Shepherd (Nashville, Tenn.: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1913), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



God is introduced as the Creator of all things; hence, he is himself the uncreated, self-existent Being, without beginning of days or end of years, from everlasting to everlasting. He created all things through the Word, and all things belong to him. His Spirit moved upon the created matter, organized it into organic form, gave to each his office, and decreed the law to rule and govern in his relation to other matter and in his own procreating work.<sup>1</sup> In this God demonstrated his omnipotence and perfect wisdom.

But not only is he eternal, omnipotent, and all-wise, he is omnipresent as well -- pure spirit, knowing no limitation of time or space, everywhere and at all times present, truly inhabiting eternity.

Lipscomb suggested that perhaps the fullest presentation of the qualities of God in one group is to be found in Exodus 34:5-7, which reads:

And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.

He then noted some of the things emphasized. In the first place, he noticed that to proclaim the name of Jehovah was not simply to announce his name, but was to make known his character, office, power, work, and position in the universe.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

The word Lord means Ruler. God then proclaims first his office as Ruler -- the Ruler of the whole universe. First and highest to him and the world is the recognition that he is ruler. All things must bow to his authority; all things must be subject to his rule. He is also "merciful and gracious," but inasmuch as his rulership is laid down as his first and highest office, all mercies must come under his rule and in harmony with his laws. All permanent good to every being depends upon compliance with his will.

He is "slow to anger," long-suffering, "abundant in loving-kindness." He desires ill to none, the greatest good to all. Evil comes only when his creatures violate the laws and pervert the provisions he has made to bestow good. God provides good. Man so perverts his own character that he is unfitted to receive the good, so it becomes evil to him. Every blessing of God will be changed into a curse if misused. He keeps "loving-kindness for thousands," treasures up his mercies, preserves his kindnesses and his blessings. He bestows them on his creatures, some of whom so use them as to change them into curses. That which blesses the obedient will bring curses to the disobedient. The one essential condition of good to every creature is to honor God and conform to his laws. Sin is the violation of the laws and principles that grow out of God's own being and that must pervade and control the whole universe. God cannot tolerate sin. His will must prevail, and every being must conform to his will and be imbued with his spirit. He

is so essentially opposed to sin that there are no provisions or circumstances under which he can "clear the guilty." He forbears, long and patiently, with those who are led into sin that they may repent and conform to his will; but he must reign, and sooner or later all must conform to his will or be crushed into eternal ruin by the almighty power and rule of God.

God is the embodiment of righteousness and justice, Lipscomb continued. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." (Psalm 97:2). He is no respecter of persons, but observes strictly the rules of right and justice, giving to every being that to which he is entitled. Man must free himself from the guilt of sin or he never can dwell with God in peace. God said, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." (Isaiah 57:15). Though he is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, he looks with pity and compassion on the one who is contrite, penitent, sorrowful in spirit, and bruised in heart by sins committed, and in such a heart, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, will he make his home. But to the presumptuous and self-sufficient God brings no blessings. So long as man feels that he has powers and resources in himself to guide him to true and lasting good he cannot feel dependent upon God for help and strength; yet the character and relation of God to the universe are such that no being can exist in permanent peace and quiet save in a state of dependence upon and willing

submission to the rule of God. Commenting further on this attitude, Lipscomb wrote:

When he realizes that he is a moral and spiritual bankrupt, without God and without hope in the world, then, and only then, he is willing and in a condition to approach and seek help from God. Hence, Jesus lays down as the first and foundation condition of all other blessings: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3). Only when we become poor in spirit are we prepared to enter into the submissive and dependent union with God that enables us to partake of his nature and enjoy all the blessings that pertain to the rule of God in the universe. In this relationship of dependence we enter into the family of God and become partners in all the joys and glories of God as the Head and Ruler. We are thus gradually trained through successive stages, and molded in character into the likeness of God, and so fitted to stand beside his Son, to bear his likeness, and, with him, share all the blessings and glories of the Father's throne.<sup>1</sup>

Another fact in God's dealing with man, Lipscomb pointed out, is that God is not dependent upon man's willingness to obey him in carrying out his purposes and accomplishing his ends on earth. He uses the wicked as his sword to destroy his enemies and to punish his unfaithful children. He uses one wicked nation to punish and destroy others, itself then to be destroyed by a more fearful destruction still. The wicked are the sword of the Lord. As God deals with nations, he deals with families and individuals. God intends to accomplish certain ends and purposes. He created man for a great end. He will use him to accomplish that end. Man has the choice of acting as an obedient servant and of being blessed and honored with God,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

or he may rebel, and, in the rebellion, be destroyed while accomplishing the end. God must rule. He has the right to rule. The well-being of the universe and his own honor demand it. All must serve him or be brought to ruin. He who disobeys God dishonors his Maker and works confusion and evil to the universe and to every creature in it. The universe is a harmonious whole, in which the well-being of every being in it is promoted by every other being faithfully discharging the duties laid upon it.

Briefly summarizing the foregoing material, Lipscomb succinctly stated:

God is the omnipotent Creator; man, the helpless creature. God is the Ruler; man, the subject. God is wise; the thoughts of the hearts of men are folly. God is holy; man is sinful and defiled. God is immortal; man is mortal, suffering, dying. . . . Man is in all things the helpless counterpart of God; yet God proposes to make him a partaker of the divine nature and to elevate and to train him into fitness to dwell with God and the spirits around his throne forever.<sup>1</sup>

In the development of this proposition in the succeeding chapters we have endeavored to present David Lipscomb's doctrine of the church.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

## CHAPTER I

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

#### The Kingdom of God

David Lipscomb did not regard the terms "church" and "kingdom" as synonymous but on one occasion he remarked: "We recognize that the church in one sense and the kingdom are the same."<sup>1</sup> Referring to Hebrews 12:22-24:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,

he wrote:

If this means that these constitute parts of the church, then the church in this sense, and the kingdom are one, as embracing all in heaven and in earth subject to the authority of God -- including God the ruler. But the kingdom of God on earth, and the church of the living God are one and the same, inasmuch as the kingdom of God on earth embraces only that part of the kingdom which is on earth. This is embodied in the church. The churches as distinct worshiping assemblies are the constituent parts of the organized kingdom on earth. It has no existence on earth save as it exists in and through them. Hence it was not organized and set up on earth until the church of Christ at Jerusalem was brought together on the day of Pentecost. The churches are the development or manifestation of the kingdom. Hence the church and

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<sup>1</sup>"Once in the Kingdom Always in the Kingdom," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 7 (February 13, 1873), 160.

the kingdom on earth were organized or set up at the same time. All the churches on earth constitute the kingdom on earth. They constitute the kingdom of God when viewed as the organization on earth over and in which God rules.<sup>1</sup>

So, he insisted, the question is, not when that kingdom came into existence, but, when was it set up on earth? He added:

We have frequently written and spoken that the kingdom of God was co-eval and co-extensive with the reign and authority of God in the universe. The kingdom of Heaven on earth is the reign, rule, or authority exercised in heaven, extended to earth and adapted to man's condition here. This certainly is no new idea, nor is it one that admits of a doubt with us. But with these statements, it is still the truth that the kingdom has not all the time existed on earth, nor does it yet embrace the whole earth.<sup>2</sup>

### The Betrayal of Trust

In the beginning, he continued, God built this world as a constituent part of his kingdom, an outer court of Heaven, in which he dwelt and over which he ruled supreme. God created man in his own likeness to honor and glorify him, and man, thus doing, was to share the life, the honor, and the glory of God himself. To man, bearing his own image, God entrusted the rule and dominion of the earth. The earth was to be so ruled as to promote God's own glory and honor and thus to increase the good and the glory of the whole universe and of every being subject to his authority. Man betrayed this trust reposed in him and transferred his al-

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<sup>1</sup>"The Kingdom of Heaven -- When Set Up," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 18 (May 4, 1876), 424.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 422.



legiance and service and, with these, the allegiance and dominion of the world from God to the wicked one.

The result of this treason and transfer was that the Spirit of God, refusing to dwell in a defiled temple, with grief withdrew to the home of God in heaven. The evil One took up his abode on this earth as the god of this world, infused his subtle spirit and the poison of death into every breeze that floated over land and sea. He infested the fountains of living waters . . . with the miasm of mortality and death. This earth was changed from a seed-bed of life into a charnel house of death. . . . Briers, thistles, and thorns grew spontaneously from this garden of God. . . . This earth, the paradise of God, became a dried and parched wilderness. Toil, pain, sickness, anxiety, care, sorrow, mortality, and death became the heritage of humanity. This wide-spread and fearful desolation and ruin, these direful results, were the effects of man's sin, of his rebellion against God.<sup>1</sup>

In his rebellion, man was separated from God, helpless under the bondage of sin. Wandering, apart from God, he degenerated -- spiritually, intellectually, and physically.

#### God Comes to the Rescue

The object of God's subsequent dealing with man, as Lipscomb taught it, was to rescue the world from the rule and dominion of the evil one; to restore man to the likeness of his Maker and to reinstate him as a ruler in this restored kingdom of God; to "make the desert blossom as the rose" and recover the beauty of Eden; to root out every plant not planted by the Father, thus making the earth again a garden of God's own planting, a loyal part of the kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, Salvation From Sin, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-115.



Lipscomb reasoned that God could have restored the world to its proper and original relations to the order of nature by destroying man, the cause of the world's ruin, and committing the rule to a being who would be more faithful to the trust. But a rule of God's being is, he asserted, "The gifts and the calling of God are not repented of" -- that is, when God has once committed a work to a being or a people, he never turns from it until, through that being or people, the designed end is accomplished. So, since he had committed the rule of the world to man, he determined to rescue the world from ruin through bringing man and, with him, the world back to their original allegiance to God.<sup>1</sup>

God intends to reassert his rightful authority over the world and to re-establish his beneficent rule and dominion among the children of men. Lipscomb conceived it to be a necessity that was laid upon God, in order to maintain his authority and position as the Ruler of the universe, thus to assert and vindicate his right to rule and govern the world. Not to do this, he argued, would be to acknowledge weakness and confess failure and to invite rebellion in other departments of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

God's declaration that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15) seems to indicate a fixed purpose to do this. From the first sin of man he began

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

training a portion of the human family as subjects fitted for his rule that he would establish.<sup>1</sup> Through man, his chosen ruler of earth, God would triumph over the enemy of man who had led in the overthrow of his authority.

### The Promised Blessing

God has had institutions embodying more or less of his rule and authority on earth from the beginning.<sup>2</sup> One such was the patriarchal institution, or the institution of "father rule." In this he taught and rewarded the patriarchs. When Abraham proved faithful above all others, much more distinctly and clearly God announced his purpose to him:

By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Here is the avowal that inasmuch as ruin was brought through disobedience, so blessing must come through obedience; and because Abraham was a peculiar example of faithful obedience, God chose his family for his especial care and blessing, and through his seed to bless the nations of the earth. If man hopes to find and enjoy this promised blessing, Lipscomb stated, he will have, necessarily, to pay attention to the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 6," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 16 (April 16, 1868), 375.

<sup>2</sup>"The Kingdom of Heaven -- When Set Up," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 18 (May 4, 1876), 423.

conditions connected with it.<sup>1</sup>

One condition is that the blessing must come to the nations of the earth through the family of Abraham. Since that is true, we may confine ourselves to his family and to God's dealings with it. That this family might be easily and certainly identified, it was important that it be distinct and separate from all other families of earth. By the intermarriage of near relations a broad and high wall of partition separated this family from all the families of men so that its identity might not be mistaken. Not only did God make Abraham's descendants a separate family, he also took it under his own especial guardianship and by his Spirit wrote its history, lest man err in distinguishing and identifying this family and fail of the promised blessing. The development of the promise was confined first to the family of Abraham, then to that of Isaac, and, still further, to the family of Jacob. The family of Jacob soon grew to the marvelous proportions of a nation, at which time God gave laws and institutions suited to their changed conditions.

Thus was instituted Judaism, or "nation rule." Of this institution Lipscomb wrote:

Judaism was a temporary, but imperfect, type of his kingdom. Even if as first ordained, it could have been regarded as his kingdom, the speedy rejection of his authority and the modeling after the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 11 (March 12, 1868), 258.

human kingdoms around them, amounted to a rejection of him and changed its character.<sup>1</sup>

Moses was the instrument through whom God gave his laws and appointments to these people at this time. In giving these laws, Moses declared:

The Lord said unto me, . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

Here another of the conditions is announced. The blessing must come in the person of a prophet like Moses who should speak in the name of the Lord. The blessing must be enjoyed through hearkening to his words.<sup>2</sup>

When the House of Jacob had become a mighty nation, with David as their king, God, under various figures, promised that he would of David's lineage raise up a Prince to rule over his people Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Lipscomb then called attention to a prophecy of Isaiah where, again, is brought to view the idea that all nations shall be blessed.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow

<sup>1</sup>"The Kingdom of Heaven -- When Set Up," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 18 (May 4, 1876), 423.

<sup>2</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 11 (March 12, 1868), 259.

<sup>3</sup>David Lipscomb, "The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 2," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 12 (March 19, 1868), 279.

unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Whereas before only one nation has been permitted to approach the mountain of the house of the Lord or be taught in his ways, the time is foretold when all nations shall flow to it and be taught in his ways. Here, too, is the idea that the institution of God is to be greatly exalted. An institution shall be established superior to all earth-born institutions and kingdoms, superior even to God's own Kingdom then in existence. And, as an additional condition, the time of this exaltation is designated as in "the last days" which, without a more definite interpretation, would indicate the last days of the then existing order of affairs -- the last days of the existence, rule and dominion of the exclusive rights and privileges of the one people, the Jews. And yet another condition is that the law should go forth from Mount Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb concluded, from the study of God's dealings up to this point, that

we may patiently and trustingly abide at Jerusalem until the coming of "the last days." During our waiting here the family of Abraham will be carried from Jerusalem into Babylon as captives -- we need not follow them there. The blessing must come through the seed of Abraham -- it must be made known first at Jerusalem. Abraham's family must again

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

return to Jerusalem or the promise of God will fail. So "tarry at Jerusalem" becomes the watchword of those seeking the blessing of Heaven even from the days of Isaiah. These are Divine pointers directing the human family forward to the development of the promised blessing. The prophecies are replete with instructions preparing the world for the reception of that blessing, by placing the ruin, devastation and destruction of the earthly kingdoms in contrast with the beneficent fruits, the peaceful working, and the final glorious triumph of the institution of God. One nation after another is brought in review by the Prophets. The short-lived prosperity, oppressive and destructive rule; the bloody and final ruin of each and every one are clearly pointed out, and man is directed to the institution of God as the only ark of safety to the ruined denizens of earth.<sup>1</sup>

The ruin of these institutions is pointed out, Lipscomb declared, that man may learn to put his trust in none and to esteem God's institution alone as worthy of his confidence and service.

Through one of the prophets of God it was revealed that when the first earthly kingdom built by man reached the strength and power of universal dominion and had carried the Jews into captivity, God presented to the king a vision of his own and future kingdoms under the image of a man, this image serving to indicate the human origin of these kingdoms. He showed their destruction, one after another, until the last one (the iron empire of Rome) when he said: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." God

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 280.



will recover the earth by establishing a kingdom founded and built by himself that shall never be destroyed, but which shall break in pieces and consume all the kingdoms of earth.

The kingdom from a small beginning should gradually grow and spread until it should become a great mountain, fill the whole earth, and, in its growth, crush and grind into powder all these earthly kingdoms until they shall be carried away by the wind and no place on earth be found for them. The final triumph will be reached gradually after many missteps and disasters, according to Daniel 7:21-28. This prophecy indicates that an earthly kingdom (or kingdoms) shall make war with the saints and shall prevail against them, until the time comes for judgment to be given to the saints of the most High and they possess the kingdom. The final result will be the complete, utter destruction of all opposing powers and the final, full establishment of the kingdom and authority of God over the whole earth.

Lipscomb considered these prophecies of Daniel clear utterances that the blessing promised to man will be developed in and through a Kingdom set up in the days of the existence of the fourth and mightiest universal empire, the empire of Rome.

### Significant Events

Time passed. Many prophets spoke. They foretold the establishment of the kingdom "which shall never be destroyed" and its work. They developed the sacred principles

which must govern it. Finally Malachi closed the Old Testament canon with a statement which indicated the day was yet future when "the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in its wings." He added:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

So then at that time the founder of this kingdom "that shall break in pieces and consume" all other kingdoms had not yet come. Even the prophet who was to be his forerunner had not yet appeared.

But much else of significance was happening!

On the political scene, the kingdom of Babylon had long since been destroyed. The successor, the Medo-Persian Empire, had extended its authority to the ends of the known world but had in turn fallen prey to the more vigorous spirit of Greece. And now Greece's power and dominion had been broken, and the fourth and strongest empire, the Roman, was upon the stage. The "last days of the existence, rule and dominion of the exclusive rights and privileges of the Jews" had come, for God's chosen people had been subjugated by the Roman governors. And Daniel had said, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

Within the family of Abraham still other events were transpiring, less public, of course, but not less portentous.



John was born in the wilderness country of Judea, Jesus in Bethlehem. Both grew to manhood and John, in his prophetic garb, began his work by preaching "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John was the messenger preparing the way, the forerunner of the Lord, and the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" was frequently on his lips. He announced its near approach and prepared his disciples for its reception when it should come. The preparation, which had been very gradual to this point, from the days of John was more marked and distinctly indicative of the speedy setting up or organization of the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>1</sup> The materials of that kingdom were in existence, the different personages who were to occupy the various places in the kingdom at its organization (including the king) were in preparation, a kind of preparatory or provisional government was established, but the kingdom was not yet open to the children of men. Lipscomb declared:

All references to the existence of the kingdom previous to Pentecost must refer to this provisional state, this preparatory government. In no other way can the statements of facts concerning the kingdom or church be reconciled or harmonized.<sup>2</sup>

John definitely fixed his own position with reference to the heavenly kingdom and its Divine founder when he said:

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He

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<sup>1</sup>"The Kingdom of Heaven -- When Set Up," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 18 (May 4, 1876), 422.

<sup>2</sup>"The Establishment of the Kingdom," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 13 (March 30, 1876), 292.

that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

This, said Lipscomb, was an emphatic declaration that John was not bringing the church, but, as a herald, was simply making ready for and announcing the coming of the Christ who was bringing the bride or establishing the church. Again John said: "He must increase, but I must decrease." John in his teachings and disciples must fade and vanish away and make room for the ever-increasing splendors and growing proportions of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. When Jesus came to John and was baptized, a voice from the Father's throne declared to the assembled multitude: "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased." From this date the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him and he performed such works as no man could do "except God be with him." John bore testimony to him, introduced him to the people as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and then disappeared from the scene.

Jesus, having been publicly recognized as the Son of God, chose twelve men to accompany him to be witnesses of all things that he should do and say. He performed before them the works which declared him to be the Son of God. After they had observed him for some time and were somewhat familiar with his works and teachings, he asked them what the world was saying about him. The answer was that the world regarded him as one of the prophets risen from the dead.

Though this was a high position it did not meet the demands of God's Son. Obviously the world had not fully appreciated him. He turned to his disciples, and directed the same question to them: "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This statement satisfied the demands of the Son of God, and forthwith came the response:

Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Here, just a few months before his death, Jesus announced himself as the builder of a church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, as the dispenser of the keys of the Kingdom of heaven -- "a kingdom which the God of heaven shall set up." The church was yet in the future, but its "foundation stone" -- the fundamental, central truth that "Jesus is the Christ the Son of God" -- is announced, and the person who is to be authorized to open the doors of this kingdom is specially and personally pointed out.<sup>1</sup> He was making all things ready for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, for the building of the church against which the gates of Hell shall not prevail. But there was one

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<sup>1</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 6," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 16 (April 16, 1868), 377.

essential lacking!

### The Two Creations

In the work of the original creation, God, the Father, originated the idea of all things and made the provisions for their creation and order. Jesus Christ, the Son, was the active agent in the prosecution of the work. But when the matter had been created and was yet in a chaotic, confused state, the Son retired from the scene and "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Spirit so directed that order, harmony and beauty sprang from chaos and confusion. The work of the Spirit was to organize matter, to give it laws to control and direct it forward in its developing, procreative power, and, having taken up his abode in these laws, to continue to guide matter forward to the accomplishment of its ultimate end. The original creation of matter, Lipscomb argued, was a type of the new creation of a spiritual world.<sup>1</sup> In this new work of creation, the same persons performed the same functions -- God originated the idea, the Son executed it, and the Holy Spirit organized the matter created. He placed each individual in proper position and gave laws to regulate and guide this new creation toward the accomplishment of its particular work. As in the old creation there was no harmonious, organized world until the Father, Son, and Holy

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<sup>1</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 7," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 17 (April 23, 1868), 398.

Spirit each had performed his work, so there was no organized church until each had executed his proper office. In conformity to this plan Jesus told his disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," and "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." Clearly, the Holy Spirit was to be the organizing, law-giving, guiding power of the new Kingdom, but he was unable to enter the world until the Christ had departed from it.

At this point Lipscomb once again called attention to the language of the Savior as recorded in Matthew 16:16-19. Peter's confession -- the first full, clear confession -- that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God," received the response as quoted above. To Peter were committed the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; the position was assigned him of first opening the door and directing men and women into the church. (In this connection, Lipscomb stood opposed to the Roman Catholic contention that Peter was the rock upon which Christ built his church. He observed: "Peter's position is that of porter to this temple. . . . Peter could not at once, in the same figure, be the foundation corner and the porter that opens the door."<sup>1</sup>). Not only are the keys committed to Peter's hand, but the further assurance is given, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in

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<sup>1</sup>"Was the Church Founded on Peter or the Truth that Christ Was the Son of God?," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 20 (May 20, 1869), 458.

heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," or, in Lipscomb's other words,

What terms soever you prescribe as a barrier to man's entrance into the kingdom of God on earth, I will ratify at my Father's throne on high; what terms soever you prescribe for admitting men into the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, I will ratify and confirm in Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

Peter alone was authorized to open the door and admit men into the Kingdom of God.

And again, after his resurrection the Lord told his disciples,

All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,

and "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." "All authority" had been given to him and by virtue of it he thus commissioned his apostles.

But though God the Father had committed his authority to Jesus Christ the Son in reference to the work of man's redemption when he announced: "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased," adding later, "Hear ye him;" though Jesus Christ, endowed with "all authority," committed it to Peter and the other apostles in reference to the induction of man into the church of God; yet the instruction was: "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem." Obviously

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<sup>1</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 8," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 18 (April 30, 1868), 422.

the important work then of opening the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of directing men and women into that Kingdom could not be entrusted to a frail, uninspired human being, although selected of God, and taught and commissioned by Jesus Christ himself. The issue at stake is too great -- Heaven or Hell to all the nations of earth. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you."<sup>1</sup>

The work of creation was not to proceed until the Holy Spirit came to guide and direct and thus fulfill his office or work.<sup>2</sup>

Divine pointers have indicated Jerusalem as the proper place; Peter, bearing the "keys of the kingdom," as the proper person; when the Holy Spirit has descended upon the apostles as the proper time for the first establishment of Christ's Kingdom or church. These three things determined -- place, person and time -- in reference to any act, and that act is infallibly identified.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Holy Spirit had now come, the proper time, and found Peter, the proper person, at Jerusalem, the proper place!

And so Peter stood up to speak!

For the message delivered this day by Peter, all former messages were but preparatory -- the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 423.

<sup>2</sup> "The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 7," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 17 (April 23, 1868), 400.



revelations of patriarchs, seers and prophets of olden times -- the teachings, works of love and power of Jesus Christ -- his death, burial, resurrection and ascension -- the descent of the Holy Spirit all come to pass, that "repentance and remission of sins might be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." From the creation of the human family to the present time, there never was a message that came from God to man clothed with so much of majesty and awe, concentrating and manifesting in its delivery so much of the authority and power of the Godhead, as the message which Peter speaks on this occasion to the assembled multitudes at Jerusalem. It is the voice of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit through Peter infallibly guiding frail, perishing men and women out of the kingdoms of darkness -- of death -- the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God, the Church against which the gates of Hell shall never prevail.<sup>1</sup>

### The Opened Door

Jesus had said, "Upon this rock (this truth that I am the Christ, the Son of God) I will build my church," so Peter, on this occasion, proceeded to present facts and testimony to support this claim. The facts were Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. The testimony was: 1) that of the people's own knowledge of Jesus; 2) the witness of the prophets, which, wrote Lipscomb,

foretell the most minute incidents connected with the birth, life, labor, suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah in a manner that none could see the connection and their full application until after their fulfillment. This, itself, was a guard against imposition, and is now a strong ground of faith in the thing they taught;<sup>2</sup>

and 3) the testimonies of the apostles, that the same Jesus

<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, "The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 8," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 18 (April 30, 1868), 425.

<sup>2</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 9," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 19 (May 7, 1868), 448.



who had been killed and buried was raised from the dead.

Having presented these testimonies to the foregoing facts, the Holy Spirit through Peter exhorted: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." As the first step toward the church against which the gates of Hell shall not prevail, Peter required men and women to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God -- the same fact upon which the Christ said he would build his church -- upon the testimonies presented. The belief of this truth, based on these testimonies, pierced the hearts of Peter's hearers, convinced them of their guilt, and caused them to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" to escape the wrath of God? Their hearts had been reached and changed. They had believed in Christ as the Son of God, as the Spirit required. This belief had laid them under obligation to obey him. Hence the question: "What shall we do?" The answer, as authoritative as any other portion of Peter's sermon, was: "Repent" -- "turn from your sins with full purpose of heart to serve the Lord" -- "and be baptized every one of you (who have believed and repented) in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and did receive the promised remission of sins.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, Salvation from Sin, pp. 146-147.

This was the first time that the kingdom of God was opened by the apostles, and

on the first occasion, when the world knew not the way, there must have been a fullness and specific-ness of direction, a careful and distinct enumeration of the steps to be taken in their connection, that was not needful in after references. After the steps to be taken and the order was once clearly made known, an allusion to one leading step or point of the order called up all of them. These were the steps to be taken, this the rule to be followed, the fixed direction of the Spirit of God, sealed by the blood of Christ, world wide in its <sup>1</sup> application, and to stand to the end of the world.

The order is a natural one -- belief, repentance and baptism. The requirement of the Holy Spirit was to believe that Jesus was made "both Lord and Christ," to repent and be baptized "into the remission of your sins." To be baptized into remission, Lipscomb reasoned, is to be baptized into Christ because in Christ is to be enjoyed remission of sins and every blessing of God.

Believe into Christ, repent into Christ, be baptized into Christ, are scriptural statements that show all stand on the same side of remission and are similarly related to it. Believing into Christ leads through repentance into Christ and being baptized into Christ. They are successive steps in the path that leads into Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Lipscomb declared that in all dispensations of God to the world, the condition of men being blessed by God has been trust in him manifested by obedience. This principle is unchangeable, though the tests or conditions by which God proved this faith have changed often. But nowhere is there

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>"Baptized into Christ," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 24 (June 13, 1901), 377.

an example of God blessing through an unproved faith. "The proved faith is the approved faith." In the Christian dispensation baptism is the test of faith -- and is the act that passes the believer into Christ. It seemed to Lipscomb that God

could not more certainly conjoin faith and forgiveness, or more certainly show that forgiveness comes through faith, than by making the act that proves the faith the act on which he would acknowledge the believer the child of God and the act that passes him into Christ, to walk and live in Christ, and to die in Christ and be raised in him. As baptism is the proving of faith, to teach that we are baptized into Christ teaches that we believe into Christ. He who denies that we are baptized into Christ denies we enter Christ through faith. Baptism into Christ and believing into Christ are one. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."<sup>1</sup>

To believe into Christ, to repent into Christ, and to be baptized into Christ are not only successive steps leading into Christ, he asserted, they are the exact equivalents of each other, since repenting into Christ and believing into Christ both lead to and through baptism into Christ.

There can be no being baptized into Christ without believing into Christ, and repenting into Christ. They are different degrees and names for the same thing. To repent is to express the faith with the will, is to surrender the will to faith; to be baptized is to express the same faith by the body, to surrender the body to the guidance of faith. Faith cannot be perfected and declared without repentance, and neither faith nor repentance without baptism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Baptized into Christ," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 42 (October 18, 1906), 665.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Of this Lipscomb was quite certain, and hence, stated positively: "The Bible nowhere calls a person a Christian or recognizes him as in Christ until faith has embodied and declared itself in baptism."<sup>1</sup>

The words Lipscomb used to summarize his series of articles on "The Blessing Promised to Man" and bring those articles to a close serve admirably to summarize this chapter:

Now, God, through a long series of centuries, by a constant, unceasing dealing with the world was preparing it for the establishment of his Church on this day. We have been guided by Divine pointers from the very beginning directing us down through the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, through the house of David, by Jesus Christ, to Jerusalem as the place where the blessing of God shall be found. God sends his Son into the world, commits to him his authority; he suffers, sorrows, dies, is buried, wrestles in the dark chambers of the grave with death, prevails over it, rises from the dead, and ascends to his Father's throne to be crowned and glorified. He authorizes the Apostle Peter to direct men and women into the Kingdom, against which the gates of Hell shall never prevail. Peter tarries at Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes; it inspires him, and by the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he gives men the foregoing direction for an entrance into the Kingdom of God. Whoever then believes, with all the heart, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, upon the testimonies God has given in the Bible concerning him, repents of his sins and is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins is guided by God, Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit; infallibly guided, not into the Romish or the Episcopal, not the Presbyterian, nor the Baptist, or the Methodist, or the Disciples' Church; but into the Church of the Living God, in which there is safety, security, and life eternal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Baptist Theology," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 19 (May 9, 1907), 297.

<sup>2</sup>"The Blessing Promised to Man -- No. 9," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 19 (May 7, 1868), 451.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BASIS FOR UNITY

#### God is the Ruler

The fundamental relationship of God to the world and to the universe and to every creature in the universe is, God is the ruler. Man, then, is his subject. The only relation of harmony that man can sustain toward God is that of loyal submission to the laws of God.<sup>1</sup>

This statement sounds the keynote in the teaching of David Lipscomb concerning authority. "God is the great head whence originates all the authority, control, power of the universe."<sup>2</sup> The relationship between God and any being in the universe, determining as it does that being's relation to every other being in the universe, becomes at once the most important of all possible relationships. To violate this relationship -- to break the laws regulating it -- is then to commit a greater offence than to violate any of the lesser or secondary relationships. The greatest commandment of the Jewish law is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." To violate this relationship of love is to strike a blow at the existence of the divine government itself. Hence, to

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, Salvation from Sin, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>David Lipscomb, "Which Are the Higher Duties of Life?," Gospel Advocate, XXIV, No. 12 (March 23, 1882), 180.

reject God is to disturb the harmony of the universe. Rejection of God causes separation from the source of all good and establishes union with the source of all evil.

Lipscomb made a careful study of the Old Testament record and concluded that in the days of Adam and Abraham God required implicit obedience to his commands as the condition of acceptance with him. Furthermore, he wrote,

under the Mosaic dispensation, all union, all reconciliation with God, all blessings from God were attained through humble, faithful, unfaltering obedience to God. And that obedience must arise from a confidence in God's wisdom, power and goodness. Their estimation of him must be such that they regarded his institutions, laws, and provisions the perfection of all wisdom. And if they failed to see the excellency and beauty, the failure was, because they were weak, and short-sighted, not because God's institutions were not sufficient, or if the institutions were simple and feeble within themselves, they had the abiding confidence that God was able and would give to the weakest and infuse into the feeblest institution when used by his appointment the strength and power of his omnipotent might. There was no tampering or tinkering with his appointments, no setting them aside for others more efficient in the eyes of man. Indeed the institution of God's appointment was regarded simply as his own chosen means through which he exerted his power. It was sacrilege to touch it. The entire dealing of God with the Jewish people, from the first calling of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees until the final destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering into captivity of the Jewish nation, is but a repetition of the principles laid down. Every page of the history of his dealing with this people is indelibly stamped with the truth, that all religion with them resolved itself into a diligent hearkening to the voice of God and a faithful obedience to his laws. In this way only was man reconciled to God and through this agency was that reconciliation perpetuated and perfected under the law of Moses.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"What Is Religion? No. 3.," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 8 (February 23, 1871), 174.



He noted particularly the experience of Samuel when confronted by the leaders of the Jewish nation with the request for a king, and observed:

From this . . . we learn that God does not allow his servants to change his appointments for others pleasing to them, even when these appointments are perverted and abused by bad men. A desire to change them then, is a rejection of God and his authority. This is an important lesson. The simple appointments of God seemed weak at best. They lacked external unity and the conditions of human strength. They were perverted and abused. The Jewish people saw strong, successful organizations in the nations around. They did not believe that God had tied them down to a cast iron form. They desired to ingraft this successful form upon the system God had given them. They of course had lost faith in God's simple appointments before they could possibly desire a modification of them.<sup>1</sup>

This is in harmony with an earlier statement in which he declared that Adam had first distrusted God before he disobeyed him. His distrust had led to disobedience. In that connection, Lipscomb asserted: "Man seldom disobeys God until he first distrusts him. He never forsakes God's appointments for other institutions without first losing confidence in God."<sup>2</sup> But in Israel's request for a king he saw another great lesson. He declared, significantly:

The truth is taught, that when men lose confidence in the simple institutions of heaven, and in any manner desire their modification or change, God permits them to change to suit their own preferences. But he makes use of this changed institution to still further corrupt, punish, and destroy those who show their distrust in him by seeking other forms than

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<sup>1</sup>"What Is Religion? No. 6.," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 13 (March 30, 1871), 292.

<sup>2</sup>"What Is Religion? No. 2.," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 6 (February 9, 1871), 132.



the simple ones he gives. This principle is of wide-spread application at this day.<sup>1</sup>

### The Great Crime of Humanity

In Lipscomb's estimation the great crime of humanity from the beginning has been to turn from God and his laws to man and his inventions. "It began in Eden, it has gone wherever a son or daughter of Adam and Eve has gone."<sup>2</sup> He pointed out that under the Jewish dispensation -- the earthly type of the spiritual kingdom -- the law of God was engraved on stones and placed within the Ark of the Covenant. To preserve it from the defilement and corruption of human alteration none but the High Priest was permitted to touch the Ark that contained the law. During the wanderings of the Jews a family of Levites carried the Ark, but so jealously was it guarded that they were commanded to carry it on poles placed upon their shoulders, with the warning that whoever touched it should be smitten dead. These were lessons, Lipscomb said,

not for them alone, or with sole reference to the law of commandments engraven upon stones. They were thus prepared, by these examples, for appreciating the higher sanctity and holier awe of the law sealed by the precious blood of the Son of God. They are written for our instruction.<sup>3</sup>

But man refused to profit from such instruction! Jesus

<sup>1</sup>"What Is Religion? No. 6.," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 13 (March 30, 1871), 294.

<sup>2</sup>"Human Folly," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 27 (July 5, 1906), 425.

<sup>3</sup>"The Sanctity of the Lord's Institutions," Gospel Advocate, VIII, No. 10 (March 6, 1866), 153.

came to teach by his life and warn by his death that he came to do his Father's will, not his own; that every transgression and disobedience of God's law must meet with its just recompense of reward. But Lipscomb sadly reflected that

Jesus said in vain, "In vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."  
 . . . In vain the Holy Spirit closed the canon of revelation to man with the solemn warning: "If any man shall add unto them (the things which are written in this book), God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book." Despite all these examples and warnings man continues to mar and mutilate the order of God and turn men from the wisdom and power and grace of God to the weak and beggarly elements of the world and inventions of man that bring only death and eternal separation from God.<sup>1</sup>

This proneness in man to exalt his own ways and despise the commandments of God Lipscomb regarded as the thing which has divided and corrupted Christendom from the beginning.

Every sect in Christendom -- the Greek Church, the Romish Church, all the sects of Protestantism -- are outgrowths of the same principle that marred Eden and drove our first parents from that abode of peace and pleasure. They all, while claiming to follow God, do the commandments of men.<sup>2</sup>

He continued:

Indeed there are but two great leading principles underlying and characterizing all the religious organizations of so-called Christendom. The one recognizes God through his Son, Jesus Christ, as the

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<sup>1</sup>"Human Folly," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

sole, rightful ruler of the world, accepts his laws as given by himself as perfect and complete in all of their parts -- his institutions without human addition, amendment or alteration as fully adapted to the wants and necessities of fallen humanity, in every condition of life and for all ages of the world. It jealously regards all subtractions from or additions to that law and those institutions, as an infringement of God's reserved right, to himself be the sole ruler of man. This principle has found its development since the days of the Apostles in the simple, true Church of Christ, that in a state of greater or less purity, has raised its voice in every age against the innovation of new, untaught questions and dogmas, and against the laying of sacrilegious hands on any and every institution of divine appointment to alter, change or in any way amend them, or to degrade them by substituting for them, institutions of human mould. It maintains that God's battles must ever be fought in God's armor alone, and only with heaven's approved weapons. The principle has and ever will keep the Church of Christ one, indivisible and immutable, as God himself is inexorably one and unchangeable. The other principle recognizes human authority in religion, whether vested in a Pope, synod, assembly, conferences, associations or missionary society. It is essentially the same, whether exercised under the name of Divine authority, delegated to the Pope, the voice of the church, the ancient usages of the church, or of human expedients, tested by experience. Under these specious forms and names, it is the same principle of human authority arraying itself against, usurping the place of, and superceding Divine power by the substitution of human dogmas, institutions and expedients, for the truths and appointments of God. The Roman Catholic hierarchy is the most complete and perfect embodiment of this principle that has yet been developed to the world. All the churches forming rules and rituals for themselves, adopting human expedients in religion and not relying solely and securely upon the appointments of God for carrying out and perfecting God's work in this world are but modified developments of the same leading idea of human authority in religion. The great question involved in the battle of Christ and anti-Christ is, shall Christ alone rule the world. . . . All the sects of Protestantism must either go back and find their final resting place in the bosom of Catholicism, or they must disown all human authority in religion, discard all human names, all human rituals and human expedients, but clothed only

in Heaven's holy armor fight Heaven's battles with Heaven's God-ordained instrumentalities. There can be no compromise here.<sup>1</sup>

This position, set forth at the very beginning of his editorial career, Lipscomb ever held, and he led in an unceasing warfare against the tendency in men to assume the power and authority which belong only to God. The depth of his feeling in these matters is revealed in the following statement:

Were we convinced that man could form institutions through which he could acceptably serve his maker and do God's work on earth, or that he could in any manner change, modify, amend or combine God's institutions as he left them, such a conviction would necessarily lead us, with deep and humble contrition of heart, on our bare knees, as a sinful heretic, back to the doors of Mother Rome. We would seek admittance into her fold, and by a life of consecration to her service, we would make amends, as far as possible, for our sins against her.

.....  
But when a proposition is made to substitute some invention of man in place of God's appointments, or to admit human wisdom to sit in judgment on the institutions of God, or human experience to call their efficiency into question, we simply say, all such assumptions are high crimes against God, and arise from a lack of humble, trusting faith in him.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Rule and Limit of Faith

In the fall of 1873 a question was directed to Lipscomb "Do the teachings of the holy oracles condemn the use of Organs in church for the purpose of praising the Lord?" He devoted several columns to the answering of this question, and in his answer his attitude toward the New Testament is

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, "Romish and Protestant Churches," Gospel Advocate, VIII, No. 4 (January 23, 1866), 51.

<sup>2</sup>"Correspondence," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 41 (October 10, 1867), 814.

manifestly declared:

Our worship to God is regulated by the laws of God. We have no knowledge of what is well-pleasing to God, in worship, save as God has revealed it to us. The New Testament is at once the rule and limit of our faith and worship to God.

This is the distinctive difference between us and other religious bodies. Others accept the New Testament as their rule of faith, but do not make it the limit of their faith. They add other things as articles of faith and acts of worship than those contained in the Bible. We seek for things authorized, they for things not prohibited. Our rule is safe -- theirs is loose and latitudinarian. Ours confine us to God's appointments. Theirs opens the worship and service of God to whatever will please men. Our rule limits man's worship to the exercises approved of in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb, in 1871, concluded a series of articles on "What Is Religion?" with the suggestion that Jesus Christ, in his sermon on the mount, laid down the great principles that must rule and govern in his kingdom. After giving the specific principles, Jesus laid down a general rule that enforced all these precepts and prescribed the ground of entrance into the kingdom of God. That general rule was preceded by a caution: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." This, said Lipscomb, shows that something else than religious zeal is demanded.

The only solid ground of assurance is a consciousness that we do the will of God. That we worship him in a strict conformity to his will -- his direction. Any other worship than that which is in exact conformity to his will is iniquity. The Bible is the record of his will. To worship God otherwise than as

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<sup>1</sup>"The Organ in Worship," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 36 (September 11, 1873), 854.

the Bible directs is not only not acceptable in the sight of God but it is positive iniquity.<sup>1</sup>

Man, left to himself, Lipscomb asserted, worships self. He devotes his whole life, energies and activity to the gratification of his appetites, lusts and fleshly desires. And it is only the knowledge of God and his responsibilities to him that can lift man out of this debasing thrallldom. It appeared to Lipscomb that religionists had concluded they could harmonize the demands of religion with the gratification of fleshly desires, and to him it was the greatest mistake of the age. He saw the trends in religion as an effort to sugar-coat all the earnest, purifying truths of Christ's religion so as to make them palatable to the fleshly appetites of wicked men; to strip it of its stern, unyielding, pure, God-like characteristics and adapt it to the nature of man. And he insisted that to the extent this has been accomplished, religion has lost its power to control man and the church has become a weak and changeable institution, conforming to the whims and desires of the community in which it exists.<sup>2</sup> The Christian religion was given to man from heaven to prepare him for heaven. If it is conformed to the earthly spirit, it cannot accomplish the desired end. If it benefits and exalts man then, Lipscomb believed, it must be preserved in its God-given form.

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<sup>1</sup>"What Is Religion? No. 8.," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 15 (April 13, 1871), 333-334.

<sup>2</sup>"The Flesh and the Spirit," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 25 (June 24, 1869), 578.



Lipscomb faced squarely the idea that times change and therefore religion must be changed to suit the times. Advocates of this idea insist that inventions and improvements have been made in every other department of life. If all else is marked with improvement, they ask, why should man confine himself in religion to an ancient faith and ancient institutions? Why is it that improvements can be made in the workings of human life -- in the style of transportation, reaping of harvests, means of communication -- and yet in religion man is tied down to the forms and ideas of almost nineteen centuries past? In answer, Lipscomb propounded some questions of his own. Why is it, he asked, that day and night succeed each other, now as then, without alteration and improvement as to proportion of time or relationship? Why must men and women be born into the world under the same circumstances of suffering and sorrow now as then? Why are infants helpless, weak, subject to pains of death, now as then? In these matters, he said, all of which are of great interest to man, no change or improvement has been produced. Why?<sup>1</sup> And then he gave his explanation:

In nature God in wisdom and power, gave laws and made provisions for meeting all the contingencies of life in all parts of the universe for all time. He needs not with the development and progress of the world to make new laws and provisions to meet new demands growing out of the changed and varied condition of the world. In his wisdom he saw the end from the beginning, and with his matchless power he made provisions sufficient to meet all the contingencies

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<sup>1</sup>"The Flesh and the Spirit," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 25 (June 24, 1869), 579.



and emergencies that might arise in the workings of nature to accomplish the end for which the universe was created. It is equally true that when his spiritual kingdom was created, the laws, the institutions, the provisions of God for the development, guidance and culture of his spiritual work in the world, were amply sufficient for all time and all people, and were competent to meet all the contingencies and emergencies of life, without being amended, added to, changed or modified, either by man or God, the All-wise Father himself.<sup>1</sup>

He reasoned that if the Christian religion is to prepare man for heaven, since heaven is unchangeable the religion that would fit and prepare man for heaven "must be as fixed in all its parts, as completely stereotyped in every principle, ordinance and appointment, as unchangeable as the perfect pattern of God in Heaven for ever and for ever."<sup>2</sup> With him it was axiomatically true that the Holy Spirit made provisions for guiding God's servants both individually and collectively in every relationship in which it is lawful for them to enter.<sup>3</sup> He asserted:

The early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presented the full development of every principle of action put in operation by the gift of the Spirit to the church, by the indwelling of the Spirit within the Church. Any principle of action whose manifestation cannot be found in the primitive church, is not the outgrowth of the Spirit of God in the church.<sup>4</sup>

He was unable to find in the Bible an example of God's

<sup>1</sup>"Mr. Beecher on the Authority of the Bible," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 26 (June 26, 1873), 614.

<sup>2</sup>"The Flesh and the Spirit," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>"Union, True and False," Gospel Advocate, XXII, No. 25 (June 17, 1880), 390.

<sup>4</sup>"Items," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 15 (April 9, 1884), 231.

entrusting to man the work of forming an organization and operating it in his service. He believed that man's duty is exhausted when he faithfully and trustingly operates the divine organization and walks faithfully in the divine appointments. He had no hesitancy in saying that where and when God gives no direction, it is the duty of man to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> It seemed to Lipscomb that the idea of change, of improvement, of modification in the very least of the principles or appointments of the religion of Christ would at once prove its utter unfitness for moulding man for the unchangeable, immortal existence with God in Heaven.<sup>2</sup> Those who contend that man is at liberty to change and improve upon God's appointments and methods in religious service, Lipscomb contended, regard them as being as imperfect as those of men. They thus place God on an equality with man and his works with man's works. This is to dishonor God and his appointments, to impugn his wisdom. It is to be guilty of sacrilege and treason against God. It shows, too, he declared, that he who uses the argument, consciously or unconsciously has set aside the authority of God. He concluded:

The spirit says: Humbly, with a sense of our own weakness, submit to God. The flesh, with a feeling of its own self-sufficiency, says: Change, modify, to suit the demands of the age, the wants of society. The Spirit says: Modify and bend the

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<sup>1</sup>"Union, True and False," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"The Flesh and the Spirit," loc. cit.

age to suit God and his appointments. Hence, to follow the Spirit is to humbly bow to God, and use his simple instrumentalities and obey his law. To follow the flesh is to change the ordinances, modify the institutions, and restrain the laws to suit our ideas of propriety, our views of fitness, and our judgment of efficiency. But he that walks after the flesh is an enemy of God.<sup>1</sup>

But many religionists will not accept the New Testament as the limit of their faith and practice on the grounds that the church existed without the New Testament and we are indebted to the church for the Testament and its preservation. It is equally authoritative, therefore, in its traditions and practices as to the early polity of the church as the New Testament. The advocacy of this position by one Elder Dawson of the Christian Church elicited a response from David Lipscomb. He wrote:

In his effort to show that the church gave rise to the New Testament and not the New Testament the church, he recognizes no New Testament until it was written out. A verbal or spoken New Testament is, with him, no Testament. Hence he entirely ignores or is ignorant of the truth that the New Testament was spoken before it was written. But it was just as fully and completely the New Testament, the last perfect will of God, when given to the world by the Holy Spirit, as it was when afterwards written out. Now that New Testament sealed by the blood of Christ, was the true originator of the church. And if the church has since preserved the New Testament, it is only in the same sense in which the body preserves the blood. The blood gives the body its life, vitality and energy -- maintains the body that it may abide in it. In the same sense in which the house preserves the man, although the man builds and protects the house. Thus the word of God or the New Testament, is the preserver of the church, is its only bond of union or basis of existence, is the only shadow of authority it has for its existence, and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

thus has been the founder and preserver of the body in which it has dwelt. He who then declares that we are not indebted to the New Testament for the church certainly reasons from very false premises.<sup>1</sup>

Dawson, like others whose view of the relationship between the church and the New Testament is the same as his, also argued that no church was or could be fully organized with only elders and deacons. It must have a bishop. This bishop, he indicated without saying so, must be diocesan. Lipscomb replied that, in arguing for the diocesan bishop Dawson was repudiating such accredited historians as Mosheim, Neander, Lyman Coleman, who, though all were members of churches sustaining diocesan clergy, yet testified that there was not a trace of such in the first century and a half of the Christian era.<sup>2</sup> "But," Lipscomb concluded,

we are surprised at none of these things. When men leave the simple appointments of the Bible and persuade themselves they may add their expediences to the provisions made in the New Testament, there can be no authoritative limit to the introduction of new changes, modifications, or additions to the divine order.<sup>3</sup>

Such a stern, unyielding regard for the authority of the New Testament and the sanctity of God's institutions could not escape the label of "legalism," but Lipscomb wore it with serenity. He explained his attitude like this:

The stern command with the absolute penalty attached, is found more seldom in the New Testament

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<sup>1</sup>"Indications of Progress," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 22 (May 29, 1873), 515-520.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

scripture than we are wont to imagine. There are two forms of giving command suited to two different classes who receive the command. The servant obeys only from fear, he is not regarded as the friend of the master, so the master does not commit his plans to him, nor does he enter into the spirit of the master's labor and plans. He obeys for the reward, he fails to disobey for fear of the punishment. But a child is just as much the subject of law as the servant. If he has passed the age in which "he is under governors and tutors," in which he "differeth nothing from a servant," then he is treated by the father as a friend.

The Father's plans are opened and confided to him. He enters into the spirit of the Father's plans. The Father's will is just as much law to him as to the servant. It is more sacred in his eyes, than it could be in the eyes of the servant. Yet the will need not be expressed in the form of absolute command in order to commend it to the highest regard of the son. To express it in that form would be to depreciate the character of the son, to ignore his feeling as a son and treat him as a servant and not a son. This is the difference between the law of Moses addressed to the Jews and the will of God through Christ addressed to his children. It is none the less law, but it is law to a child and not a slave; it is addressed as to children, not slaves.<sup>1</sup>

### Steps Toward Apostasy

Lipscomb's unceasing attention to details resulted from his acceptance of what seemed to him an evident truth: that a man cannot set aside God's authority in one point and maintain it in others. He insisted that the setting aside the authority of God in one act was simply a preparation for doing it in another and another. He was sure that a man who sets aside God's order in the work will do the same when it suits him in the worship or in anything else. The lesson he tried always to impress was that the current starts out a

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<sup>1</sup>"The Lord's Day Meeting," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 24 (June 15, 1871), 554.

feeble one from the path of truth, it parts from it in some seemingly trivial and unimportant matter -- but they separate. As this current onward flows it gains volume and momentum until finally it will sweep all who float upon it into the vortex of infidelity. He gravely warned:

Every act of departure from the order of God in any point is a step towards final departure from and rejection of the whole word of God. That is the final logical result. But few follow it to its ultimate end, but every one who starts in that direction helps the current of humanity to that end, and God will hold every one accountable for his course.<sup>1</sup>

When Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit they little realized that their act was the first step of the descent into the depths of degradation which Paul so vividly depicts in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans. It is a fearful picture of human depravity but one to which man must descend when cut loose from God. Concerning this Lipscomb wrote:

A darker picture of human corruption it is difficult to conceive but it is not an overdrawn picture of man without God and his word. As man wandered from God, he degenerated spiritually, intellectually, and physically. Man's degeneracy -- spiritual, mental, moral, and physical -- the world over, in all ages, has been measured by the distance he has wandered from God and by his loss of the knowledge of God. No truth in the world's history has been established by an induction from so large a number of facts, under so varied circumstances, with so universal and uniform a result, as that man, cut loose from God and his word, gropes in ignorance and grovels in degradation with a continually accelerating descent to still lower depths.

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 Among the nations that have wandered farthest from

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<sup>1</sup>"Thoughts on Bro. Houston's Statement," Gospel Advocate, XXXI, No. 27 (July 3, 1889), 422.



God, and have for the longest time and the most completely lost the knowledge of him and of his word, it is difficult to determine in the downward descent where the human ends and the brute begins.<sup>1</sup>

This is the result Lipscomb foresaw for those who scorned what they chose to call "legalism" and insisted upon the right to adopt "expedients." He warned repeatedly: "Depart from the strict letter of the law of the Spirit, and there is no stopping point short of absolute yielding to every demand of the flesh."<sup>2</sup> He insisted that "the only safe ground is to stop before you take the first step of departure from divine law."<sup>3</sup>

#### Man Is The Servant

Reflecting upon the evil results of Adam's act, Lipscomb reasoned that if this degradation and ruin of man was caused by his separation from God resulting from his disobedience to God's law, then the means of rescue of man and the world must be by a union with God through obedience to him. As has already been noted, this obedience is necessarily implicit. The reason for this was clear to Lipscomb.

He believed and taught that God, knowing what is in man -- that is, the different elements of his nature --

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, Salvation from Sin, pp. 112-113.

<sup>2</sup>"Which? God's or Men's?," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 24 (June 17, 1869), 557.

<sup>3</sup>"Strange Developments," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 4 (January 23, 1884), 49.



determined to bring him back and govern him through his religious nature. He knew that the religious element, though slower in development, was more capable of retaining impressions and more far-reaching in its influences and results. It is the element which declares man's kinship to the divine -- the only point of approach by the Spirit of God, and the only element that can be immortalized. And it was because of the greater permanency and power of the religious element in man to endure in him to eternity and to transmit its influence to other generations that God himself gave laws to mold and govern the religion of man, but left it to man's own wisdom and experience to discover that which was best in the development of the other elements of his nature.

The wisdom of this was evident to Lipscomb. He saw that if man's religion is properly developed it will sooner or later mold all the less permanent, more impressible elements into conformity to its own character. This also explained to him why God has always regarded it a greater sin to change, pervert, or to violate the religious laws and obligations than to break the moral obligations -- why Saul's changing or violating the ordinances of religion in an over-zeal to honor God was a more heinous sin than David's adultery and murder to conceal it.<sup>1</sup> To violate the laws directly connecting man with God, laws that regulate man's

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<sup>1</sup>Lipscomb, Salvation from Sin, pp. 117-121.

fealty to the King of the universe, is to commit a greater sin than to violate the secondary laws growing out of this. This is true, Lipscomb asserted, and must be true, not only of God's government but of all governments. "Disloyalty, or treason to a government is the highest crime against that government."<sup>1</sup> Continuing this thought, he wrote:

For the government to overlook the higher crime against itself, and reward the disloyal traitor on account of his fidelity in the lower relations, would be to destroy its own authority.

This is just as true of God's government, as of any other government. Our relations to God then are the most sacred, the most important of all man's relations, and a violation of these is the greatest sin that men can commit. In accordance with this God in all ages has punished a rejection of his authority as the greatest crime of which man is capable.<sup>2</sup>

Lipscomb pointed out that Noah was approved though guilty of drunkenness; Abraham was faithful to God, yet lied; Jacob was true to God, although a deceiver and supplanter. God accepted these men even though he disapproved of their conduct. He was willing to overlook for a time these violations because of their fidelity in the higher relations, intending through these higher relations to correct the violations of the lower relations. But his condemnation came on the purest and best of men when they violated the highest relationship. When Moses forgot his dependence upon God and presumptuously exalted himself God punished him. God was intent upon re-establishing his

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<sup>1</sup>"Which Are the Higher Duties of Life?," Gospel Advocate, XXIV, No. 12 (March 23, 1882), 180.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

authority in the world. He chose to accomplish that end by a struggle through human beings, subject to the laws of human conflicts, with a divine element always manifesting its presence in this strife.

Concerning the working out of this plan on earth, Lipscomb stated summarily:

Through the patriarchal and Jewish age, there was a perpetual conflict, the main idea of which was the re-assertion of divine authority and the re-establishment of divine government upon the earth, the re-possession of the earth by God. This conflict culminated in the struggle in the grave between the evil one and God's own Son. It was the legitimate result of the conflict beginning in Eden, continuing through the ages of earth, with varying fortunes and seemingly doubtful issues, until it was reduced to a single conflict by the appearance of God's own Son on the battle-ground of earth, culminating in the single-handed struggle in the grave between him and the arch-enemy of God, the devil. During these conflicts, preliminary to the final struggle, God "winked at" much ignorance and overlooked many violations of the duties owed by his servants to their fellowmen on account of their unfaltering loyalty to him. Loyalty to him was of much higher consequence than fidelity in the lower relations of life.<sup>1</sup>

The death blow to the reign of the Evil one was given when Christ overcame him in the inner realms of his own kingdom. The conflict since, Lipscomb explained, has been the subjugation of the hordes who fail to lay down their arms even though their leader in rebellion has been overcome. This being true, God has begun more earnestly the discipline and training of his servants not only in loyalty to him but in the duties that form the character of a true servant of God,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

the principles of which had been set forth but not so fully enforced while the struggle for divine supremacy on earth was in progress. Now that the supremacy of God is established, it is still man's highest duty to maintain his loyalty to him. Man must still have such faith in God through Jesus Christ as to yield wholly to his rule and guidance. Faith makes men voluntary, willing-hearted subjects of the great king, anxious to do his will, not theirs.

#### Acceptable Obedience

Acceptable obedience, as Lipscomb viewed the matter, is obedience rendered, not because of any understanding of the why or wherefore of this or that, but simply and only because God commanded it. He wrote:

We are satisfied a low degree of understanding is compatible with acceptable obedience to the Gospel. . . . If we understand the appointment is of God -- to be submitted to by us as such; and we humbly submit to the appointment in obedience to the law of God -- all the virtue is received from it, that God intends shall be. The virtue is not in our understanding, but in God's authority connected with it.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the years, Lipscomb wrote frequently on the matter of re-baptism and it is here that we get many of his expressions concerning acceptable obedience. He was confident that nothing in religion is accepted by God unless it is done in obedience to God. "A person believes in obedience to God, he repents in obedience to God, he is baptized in obedience to God. So far the individual acting

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<sup>1</sup>"Inquiry," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 12 (March 19, 1868), 268.

in obedience to God does right."<sup>1</sup> He was equally confident that God saves those who obey him! He taught that only two things can invalidate the act of baptism: 1) The lack of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God nullifies the act as baptism; 2) The absence of a disposition to obey God destroys the essential character of the act.<sup>2</sup> But in religion, since all submission must be from the heart, only the person who obeys can tell if he is submitting to the direction of God. "But," Lipscomb declared,

he does know whether he believed; he does know whether he was baptized to submit to God, or he is not responsible. When a man tells me that he did believe in Christ, that he was baptized to submit to him, I am compelled to accept that statement or pronounce him either a fool or a liar.<sup>3</sup>

He firmly believed and clearly taught that everyone who believes in Christ, repents of his sins and is baptized into Christ is thereby in the body of Christ, the church.<sup>4</sup> He had no doubt that a man can be born into Christ wherever he can learn the truth, believe in Christ, and be baptized to obey him. But, he reasoned, just as a child may be born in conditions in which it cannot live as it should, so a man can be born into Christ in conditions in which he cannot live as he should. He is required to

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<sup>1</sup>"Can a Person Obey God in a Sect?," Gospel Advocate, XX, No. 43 (October 31, 1878), 680.

<sup>2</sup>"That Hard Question Again," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 27 (July 6, 1871), 633.

<sup>3</sup>"Re-baptism," Gospel Advocate, XXI, No. 5 (January 30, 1879), 69.

<sup>4</sup>"Editorial Brevities," Gospel Advocate, XXV, No. 25 (June 20, 1883), 385.

associate with a church of God, not with a party or man-made church. He can live a Christian only in the church in which he can do all God requires him to do and which discourages his doing all God has not required. Lipscomb contended that if the Baptist or any other church of human origin permits this, a man may live a faithful child of God in it. If it does not permit this, the child of God ought to seek one that does.<sup>1</sup> Lipscomb submitted:

A church of Christ lays on its members the obligation to obey the will of God in all things, and offers the opportunity of worshiping him in his appointments, and imposes upon them nothing save what God imposes. Every such church is a church of God. Its members may prove unfaithful -- but that is their sin. Many in other churches may in heart desire to do this service to God, but their churches impose other rules, and fail to furnish them the opportunities of worshiping God. The churches are wrong and the individuals should come out from such and be simply Christians and enter the churches whose order is guided by the word of God.<sup>2</sup>

In 1868, when there was some correspondence between Dr. T. W. Brents and D. B. Ray, a Baptist, relative to a debate, David Lipscomb wrote that he, or Dr. Brents, was

more than willing to affirm that the congregations worshiping according to the New Testament order throughout the land -- disowning all creeds, authority, names and practices, save those given by Divine authority and embodied in the Bible, constitute the veritable Kingdom of God on earth, and no other body or bodies constitute that Kingdom or any part of it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"More About Re-baptism," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 18 (May 2, 1907), 281.

<sup>2</sup>"What Is Godliness?," Gospel Advocate, XXXI, No. 49 (December 4, 1889), 775.

<sup>3</sup>"The Debate," Gospel Advocate, X, No. 10 (March 5, 1868), 221.



In 1873, in a discussion as to what constitutes valid baptism, he re-affirmed this, at the same time insisting that he had never said "that individuals of the sects are not in the kingdom of God." To say that the sectarian bodies constitute no part of the kingdom of God is, he wrote,

a very different thing from saying no Baptist or Methodist is in the kingdom of God. The Masonic institution, the Odd-Fellows, the temperance organizations are no part or parcel of the kingdom of God, yet we should be far from saying no member of these organizations is in the kingdom of God. I may think that members of the kingdom of Christ are out of place in these institutions, but that does not destroy their new membership in the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

He then compared Judaism with its various sects to Christianity with its sects, declaring that God always recognized those who had complied with the conditions of his law as members of the Jewish nation, no matter how many other ceremonies they had passed through. More than this, he suggested that whenever a priest connected with any of these sects or parties of Judaism practicing a very corrupted form of Judaism performed a service for a man who came according to the law himself, that act was accepted of God as true service by the man for whom it was performed. Now the Baptist Church may not be a part of the kingdom of God and yet be a party with corrupted teachings and practices in that kingdom. Furthermore, while the Baptist sect is unknown to the Bible, it is none the less true that when a man believes in Christ,

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<sup>1</sup>"What Constitutes Valid Baptism?," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 2 (January 9, 1873), 41.



repents of his sins, and is baptized in obedience to the law of God he is accepted of God, a member of the kingdom, or God's word is not true. He concluded:

If he believes, repents and is baptized in obedience to the law of Christ, he is right, the promise is his. Should he then turn aside and unite with a mere sect in or out of the kingdom with a corrupted law and practice, this may affect his standing as a faithful member of that kingdom, but it cannot affect his membership in that kingdom.

.....  
 God deals with people very much as they claim to be. The Jews sinned in desiring a king, to the extent that they rejected God. Sec. Samuel 8th. Still they claimed to be subjects of God, he dealt with them as such, condemned them for failing to live as sons -- not as he condemned other nations who did not claim to be his subjects. God will deal with Baptists we doubt not as members of his kingdom; but will hold them to an accountability for not doing according to the requirements and laws of the kingdom. So will he all who profess to be his servants. Those who have destroyed the character of his initial ordinance will be condemned for this, those who are responsible for division in his kingdom on account of any addition to or subtraction from his laws will be held to an accountability for this infraction. Whenever a man finds he is in the kingdom, and in a sect or party in that kingdom, let him get out of his errors and stand on broad Catholic ground.<sup>1</sup>

#### Truth Must Be Maintained

Lipscomb was neither naive when he made this observation nor overly optimistic about its acceptance with men. He recalled the statement: "Ten men can be found with ability to see the truth, where one can be found with courage to maintain it," and sadly reflected: "Courage to stand by the truth is the most desirable, as it is one of the rarest virtues among men."<sup>2</sup> In the closing number of the Gospel

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Editorial Notes," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 8 (February 20, 1884), 119.

Advocate for 1901, Lipscomb, now an old man, pointed up some of the lessons of the passing year. One of them, he wrote sadly, is that

men cling very tenaciously to customs and parties; they are slow to break off from old associations and to turn from well-beaten paths. In religion, as in politics, men love and cling to parties rather than to principles, to organizations more than to truths. Many in religion, as in politics, will labor earnestly to keep the party right; but if they fail in this, they will trample under foot the truth and go with the party, right or wrong.<sup>1</sup>

He further observed that in such great reformers of the past as Tyndale, Wickliffe, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Wesley, there was one trait of character which gave to each of them his influence for good. That trait was the courage to stand firmly by the truth and patiently bear and suffer whatever fate fidelity to that truth might bring. He insisted that no one of them ever could see a wrong, condemn a wrong, yet continue in and build up that wrong. They possessed, he said, a quality that was Christ-like, for it was his refusal to participate in and encourage wrong in anything, or in any way, that distinguished Jesus as the Christ from all other human beings. Lipscomb noted that there were many men in the days of Luther who were his equals in mental power, his superiors in learning, who saw the errors of the age, who even exposed and protested against them, yet whose work came to nothing because, while exposing and protesting against the errors, they lived in them and practiced them.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Passing Year and Its Lessons," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 52 (December 26, 1901), 824.

In over-all effect they were building up and strengthening error instead of destroying it. The Christian, Lipscomb exhorted, should refuse to fellowship wrong. That does not involve, he added, a refusal to live in the church with persons who engage in wrong practices, but simply involves a firm determination not only to protest against the wrong, but to refuse all participation with what is wrong.<sup>1</sup> It was his conviction that the New Testament did not authorize a member to withdraw from a church on account of irregularities or wrongs in the church, and he concluded that "a man ought to stand faithfully to his post and bear testimony for the right and if a separation takes place, let the party in the wrong be responsible for it."<sup>2</sup> It is needless to say, perhaps, but this position was surprising to some. Lipscomb gave no comfort or countenance to extremists.

He desired earnestly to maintain truth. He knew that truth is universal and will conjoin those who practice it in one body. This is the unity for which he constantly strove. He knew that there could never be unity in error because there is no standard in error to make its devotees one. Unity is impossible without a standard to make persons who accept it one. He wrote:

God demands we shall be one in Christ -- shall be one by the sanctifying power of his word, which is

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<sup>1</sup>"Editorial Notes," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 8 (February 20, 1884), 119.

<sup>2</sup>"Another Mistake," Gospel Advocate, XIV, No. 1 (January 3, 1872), 16.

truth. Those who act independently of his word cannot be sanctified by it. They cannot be one. Only by continuing within his word can we be free and be one in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### Denominational Union Not The Answer

Lipscomb believed strongly that denominationalism is an injury, a curse, and a hindrance to the perception of faith to every one who comes under its influence. He felt that everything having a tendency to consolidate the children of God into a denomination or party, with interests, prejudices, and principles necessary to the prosperity and honor of the body is evil and should be most carefully avoided by Christians. Every standard, or creed, separate from the Bible is an evil committal to something that may be wrong. He removed one of the greatest sources of disunity, prospectively at least, by appealing to men to "have nothing formularized and if we find we are wrong, no pride of consistency prevents our change."<sup>2</sup> His attitude toward a union of denominations, quite in line with the statements above, is revealed in an article written at a time when there was some sentiment manifested favoring a union of Baptists and Reformers. Lipscomb expressed himself thus:

We suggest that we believe denominational union is undesirable; that if we must have denominations, the more the better. For centuries the people of many countries at least, were united in one denomination. These were dark days for the church and

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<sup>1</sup>"Meetings Extra Scriptural," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 36 (August 30, 1906), 553.

<sup>2</sup>"Mr. Graves' Advice," Gospel Advocate, XIV, No. 10 (March 7, 1872), 233.

the world. We pray the experiment of uniting all the people in one denomination may never be repeated. We are entirely opposed to any denominational union on any terms. Christians ought to be one in Christ. To make them one in him, they have only to drop off all of their human and denominational characteristics, and be faithful and true to Christ. When we all do this, we will be one; not by an effort to unite and harmonize with each other, but by all becoming one with Christ and in Christ. Every man that is one with Christ, or in Christ, is one with every other person that is one in or with Christ. The idea that men are one with Christ, yet not one among themselves, but divided, dissevered and discordant, is a deception too palpable for sensible people to practice on themselves. So far as I am separated in religious life from any other Christian, so far must he or I, or both of us, be separated from Christ. No denomination is united in Christ, or can be.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb was positive that churches cannot be made one by patching up compromises, or by meeting on common ground by agreeing to drop individual, church or denominational peculiarities, and forming a basis of union in the things on which they agree. This, he was sure, would not be the union prayed for by the Savior. Jesus desired they should be united through and sanctified by his word. So, Lipscomb declared, "the only basis of union is the word of God, the only authority to enforce it is the law of God."<sup>2</sup> As he saw things, the only way that Christian union is to be obtained and maintained is by Christians agreeing that they will mutually obey whatever is positively enjoined in the New Testament and insist upon nothing beyond that. He believed

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<sup>1</sup>"Union of Baptists and Reformers," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 21 (May 21, 1884), 327.

<sup>2</sup>"Christian Unity," Gospel Advocate, XXV, No. 1 (January 4, 1883), 4.

that if each man would appeal to the Bible only, he would have no need to ask for a concession from his brethren. In that case opinion would give place to faith; convenience, preference, and expediency to divine authority. He deplored the fact that Christians so often retained their distinct peculiarities because they are not forbidden by the word of God, declaring it a dangerous principle and one of the rocks on which sects are split. "The things which are specially required are the things which are to be done, and not the things which are not specially forbidden," he warned.<sup>1</sup> "Do the Scriptures forbid?" is a question fraught with evil, Lipscomb said. "Under that species of reasoning all the corruptions and evils of Christendom have crept into the churches of Christ."<sup>2</sup> He taught that if we will seek and walk by that which is authorized and not by that which is not forbidden, Christians will walk a safer road to unity, harmony, happiness and favor with God.<sup>3</sup>

In the closing number of the Gospel Advocate of 1906, in an article paralleling the course of the Cumberland Presbyterians with that of the Disciples, Lipscomb revealed his unshaken faith in the course he had pursued with others and his unswerving loyalty to God. He wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>"How Shall Christian Union Be Maintained?," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 30 (July 28, 1870), 697.

<sup>2</sup>"Questions for the Editor," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 2 (January 14, 1869), 29.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



The disciples started out on a basis that must in its workings destroy all sects -- a basis and principle, too, that must succeed; that is, we will faithfully do what God requires us to do in his service, adding nothing thereto, taking nothing therefrom. If every man, woman and child now living were to turn their backs upon and fight against this principle, it would not shake my faith in the final and complete triumph of the principle as the only and true basis of service to God and of success to his cause; because without the success of this principle God cannot succeed, he cannot rule the universe. My faith in this principle and its success is just equal to my faith in God and his final and absolute rule over all things. . . .

It is just as true today as it ever was that there is but one ground of union for the people of God. It is just as true as God is true that the world can never be converted to Christ and be saved until the children of God are one -- one in Christ, made so by hearing and doing the commandments of God, adding nothing thereto, taking nothing from it. It is as true as God is true that all who obey Christ and his word will be made one in Christ. Christ makes them one.<sup>1</sup>

Are Lipscomb's ideas practical? Can they be used to promote the union of Christians today? We believe they can. Lipscomb himself saw his teaching put into effect in one instance and was satisfied that it was good. This was the time when Z. T. Sweeney did the preaching in a meeting at the Vine Street church in Nashville in May, 1901. Lipscomb told about it. Sweeney was attracting large audiences, and as the meeting drew to a close it was suggested that the last service be held in the Tabernacle. The elders of the Vine Street church agreed to this and wrote directions that it should be done without any instrumental music, or even the singing of a solo, or anything that would

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<sup>1</sup>"A Parallelism," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 52 (December 27, 1906), 825.

offend the conscience of any Christian. This was done to bring about a union of all the disciples in the city in this service. Several thousand persons attended, showing how simple and effective the means to secure union and harmony among the disciples of Christ are when it is really desired. But Lipscomb pondered the result -- and wondered -- and wrote:

We appeal to these brethren to know if the same union and cooperation among Christians are not desirable at all times and in all places, and may these not be attained by the same simple and easy means? Drop out everything not required by God, and, without effort, all who love the Lord in sincerity and in truth will flow together in Christian love and union; they cannot help it; but they never can do it without this course. That is God's way to unite his people, and he will not tolerate their union on any other grounds. I care not how many attempt union on other grounds, or how few stand on this, God stands on this, and to him they must come; he will confuse their tongues on any other grounds.<sup>1</sup>

He then asked if the sacrifice of anything and everything not required in the word of God that stands in the way of the union of God's people for which Christ prayed is too great for one to make? Can any Christian man or woman afford not to sacrifice everything that stands in the way of this union? He observed that it is useless to talk of this or that being a little thing, for nothing is little in the sight of God that involves the question of loyalty to him and the union of those who believe on him.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Sweeney's Meeting," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 24 (June 13, 1901), 377.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

As has been noted already, Lipscomb was not unduly optimistic about the success of efforts made to effect the union of professors of Christianity. He had shown how it must be achieved, and he had noted how few they were who were willing to work along those lines. He therefore concluded:

Separation after separation must come until the lines of cleavage run with the line of loyalty to God. Until division along this line is reached, divisions must continue and multiply. . . . Divisions must come until we are all willing to be led by God.<sup>1</sup>

With him it was a matter of uncertainty when this would be, but of one thing he was absolutely sure. That was that

the Gospel Advocate may betray the principles it has maintained; it may turn and follow the popular current. Stranger things have happened. Every institution of learning, every professor, every preacher in the land, every soul able to read his mother tongue, may give up the purity of the church, and turn to these popular additions of men, and may affirm by his action that God is both a fool and a liar; yet the foundation of God stands sure, and he will vindicate his right to rule, the sufficiency of his institutions to accomplish his work; and he will present unto himself a church without spot or blemish, without wrinkle or any such thing, just as he gave it. He will do this if he has to destroy in hell every institution of learning, every newspaper -- big or little, every preacher -- in places important or unimportant, every one made a scholar, by turning against the sufficiency of the word and appointments of God. God will rule; God will vindicate his truth, the sufficiency of his institutions. Of this I have not the least doubt.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Divisions Must Come," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 40 (October 3, 1907), 633.

<sup>2</sup>"A. Campbell and Missionary Societies," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 24 (June 11, 1884), 375.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NATURE AND CONTINUITY OF THE CHURCH

#### The Spiritual Body of Christ

Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The rock to which he referred was the great truth confessed by Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." At Jerusalem the apostles, led by Peter, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit preached this truth. The testimony on which this truth rests was presented. Men and women were exhorted to believe this testimony, repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. As many as did receive those words were baptized and the same day were added to the band which was already there waiting. These then "continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers." Without any more organization mentioned than this they were called "the church." "A band of disciples thus inducted into Christ, and putting themselves under the teaching of the apostles, without further organization, is a church of God, is the church of God in that place."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, "The Church," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 12 (March 25, 1885), 177.

Under the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, the church of Jerusalem was scattered abroad and they "went everywhere preaching the word." They went everywhere repeating the truth that Jesus was God's Son and presenting the testimony which sustained it. In this dispersion Philip went to Samaria and preached the "good news," whereupon many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized. True, they are not spoken of as a church just yet, but the inspired historian soon refers to the "church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" as having "peace," thus indicating that those obedient to the Lord constituted a church. Other disciples went as far as Antioch, preaching the word. They preached it even to the Gentiles, and a church was established there. Along with these passages there are several others in Acts which clearly refer to the disciples in a community striving<sup>1</sup> to do the will of God as the church in that community.

Having given attention to the uses of the term "church" in Acts, Lipscomb noted the various passages throughout the remainder of the New Testament in which it is used. He observed that Paul speaks of "all the churches of the Gentiles" and "the church that is in the house of Aquila and Priscilla," (Romans 16); the Corinthians are addressed as "the church of God at Corinth," (I Corinthians 1); in Colossians he refers to Christ as being "the head of the body, the church," (Colossians 1:18, 24); and, in Ephesians, that God "gave him to be head over all things to the church, which

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

is his body," (Ephesians 1:23). The church is thus declared to be the body of Christ; the individual Christians the members of that body.<sup>1</sup>

To the Romans Paul says: "For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another." He is comparing the church to the human body, with its different members all united in one spiritual body. Lipscomb pointed out that those in the spiritual body of Christ should have the same care for the others that the earthly members of our bodies have for each other. We are members one of another, as we are members of the one body of Christ. As we realize our spiritual relation in Christ, we will look to the good of each other. As each member of the physical body performs a different work and fills a different office from the others, and all members are essential, just so, in the church, the spiritual body of Christ, each member has its appropriate office and work to do, and by virtue of all being members of the one body they are members one of another, each dependent upon the life and fidelity of the others for his own spiritual activity and life. In showing how each should perform his office, Paul makes application of his statement to the disciples in Rome as the one body in Christ at Rome.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



To the Corinthians Paul writes: "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular," (1 Corinthians 12:27). Again he uses the human body with the different members performing different offices, yet altogether composing the one body, to illustrate the body of Christ or the church with its different members performing the different offices needful to the well-being of the body. In that body there are comely and uncomely members, weak and strong, active and inactive, helpful and helpless; but all are to exercise a care for the others, for all of them constitute one body, of which Christ is the head.<sup>1</sup>

This idea is further emphasized in Paul's letter to the Ephesians when Paul refers to the gifts which had been administered to the disciples in Ephesus for the purpose of enabling them to

grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.

Lipscomb explained that this passage teaches that the Christian, grounded and rooted as he is in the faith in Christ, since Christ is the head of all things, should move as he directs, just as all members of the fleshly body move at the will of the head. If men practiced fully the truths Christ taught their lives would conform to the life of Christ. Jesus is the head, and from him the church, which is his body, is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

fitly joined together and compacted by being knit together. The means used for this knitting together is the truth. Just as the human body is connected with the head by joints and ligatures, so the spiritual body is united and grows up into the head by spiritual joints. All the members are united with that head. Now every member has his work to do, and by every member working effectually in his place the body is made to grow. By joint, harmonious working of all the parts, the body grows into the well-proportioned body of Christ, all moved and governed by him as the living head. This union, of course, Lipscomb noted, is a spiritual union.<sup>1</sup>

In October, 1890, in a meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee held for the purpose of laying plans for the establishment of a state missionary society, a Bro. Rhoulhac took the position that the whole body that was to be joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies (Ephesians 4) was the church universal. Lipscomb observed:

Then the churches at Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville are just joints of that body. One is the foot, another the eye, another the ears, etc. The attempt to carry this out is the entire destruction of the churches, and the logical and necessary outgrowth is a hierarchy that necessarily runs into Episcopatism or Romanism.

Paul says to the church at Corinth, "Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." And wherever a church of Christ doing its duty is found, there is the body of Christ, of which he is the head. No other church is addressed in the scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, Vol. IV: Ephesians, Philipians and Colossians, (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Company, 1952), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>"Convention Notes," Gospel Advocate, XXXII, No. 43 (October 22, 1890), 678.

He then affirmed that

each church or congregation in a community is recognized as a church of God within itself, without any reference to any other church, or part of a church. The church at Rome is a church within itself, is the church of God at Rome, without reference to, or connection with, any other church in the world; it is the body of Christ in Rome. So is the church in Corinth; it is the body of Christ, with all the members and functions of the complete body of Christ within itself. Part of the members of this body, not in Corinth, another part in Rome, another in Antioch; but each church within itself, living according to the law of God, is a complete development of the full body of Christ, without reference to any other church or body in the world.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Only Manifestation of the Church on Earth

He cited the church in Jerusalem as an illustration of his point. The church in Jerusalem was in existence before any other church, and he was sure that it was the body of Christ when it was the only church on earth. Equally certain was he that the planting of other churches did not take from it any of its parts or functions, nor did it despoil it of its completeness as a body of Christ. And it was his oft-stated conviction that the Ethiopian eunuch possessed within himself all the elements of a church of Christ when no other churches were in reach of him.<sup>2</sup> The church is a spiritual body. The only manifestation of the church is where the Spirit controls the bodies of men and brings them into obedience to the gospel. The physical bodies

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<sup>1</sup>"The Church," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 12 (March 25, 1885), 177.

<sup>2</sup>A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, Vol. IV: Ephesians, p. 54.

under the control of the Spirit separate themselves from the world as servants of Christ.<sup>1</sup> As evidence to sustain this idea, Lipscomb contended that the word "church" or

Ekklesia simply means "called out," "separated from." It does not carry within it the idea of assembly or coming together. The separated may be together, may be an assembly, indeed the assembling together may be the act in some cases that separates from others. Still the assembly constitutes no inherent part of the ekklesia. The separated are as much the ekklesia, the church, when separated as when together.<sup>2</sup>

Lipscomb also referred again to Hebrews 12:22-24, and observed:

These are the associations into which the entrance into Christ brings man. These are all spirits; the relation is a spiritual one; and when the spirits of men become subjects of this kingdom or members of this body, these spirits control the bodies they inhabit and separate them from the world and bring them into subjection to Jesus Christ. These bodies of men, controlled by the Spirit of God, are the only manifestations of the church visible to men in the flesh. This shows the close relation that the church and every individual member bears to Christ the head. This relation is a spiritual one and is regulated by the Spirit of the head permeating all the members of the body. But the Spirit does this through the truths he presents.<sup>3</sup>

He taught that these bodies of men, controlled by the Spirit of God, are spoken of by the Apostle Paul as "holy temples" of God on earth. He explained that in Ephesians 2:20-22, Paul teaches that each building formed by men and women entering Christ grows "into a holy temple in the Lord"; Christians "are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> "The Christian Quarterly," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 2 (January 14, 1885), 26.

<sup>3</sup> A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

He concluded:

The Bible clearly recognizes each separate congregation as the body of Christ, as builded together for a dwelling place in the Spirit. So that God in his Spirit dwells in each distinct and separate church.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb insisted that a man that does not constitute a part of the local body of Christ does not constitute a part of that body at all; and, where there is no local church, there is no church. He suggested that it is similar to the fact that a man cannot be a constituent part of the Masonic body unless he is a member of some one of its local bodies; and, the Masonic body cannot exist in a country where there are no local bodies.<sup>2</sup>

He went ahead to point out the uses of the word "church" by noting that when anything is spoken of as common to the whole body of God's children in heaven and earth, the word church is used in its most unlimited sense. When anything is spoken of as common to all the local bodies in any given territory, the church in that territory is referred to.<sup>3</sup>

So he taught that

the word church, as applied to anything else than the believers living in one community, is used only when something is affirmed that is true of all the churches in the country or territory to which the term is applied.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Vol. II: First Corinthians, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> "The Church," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 11 (March 18, 1885), 166.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., No. 12 (March 25, 1885), 177.

However, he firmly insisted that "disciples in every locality living under the direction of the apostolic teaching constitute the church of God in that community."<sup>1</sup>

The only manifestation or development on earth of the church is the individual congregation. The church cannot be approached save in and through the congregations, it cannot act save through it. It cannot exist on earth save through and in the congregation. The individual congregation can act as a whole or through its individual members. Just as the human body to which the spirit likens it, can act as a whole or through one member. Then the idea of a church on earth, save as it manifests itself in the individual congregations and through its individual members, is contrary to every presentation of that church in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, when C. W. Sewell requested an article from Lipscomb concerning the plan revealed in Scripture for churches to co-operate in sending out the gospel, Lipscomb replied:

The word church as indicating the whole body of believers is never used in New Testament Scripture when work of these churches is referred to. And we doubt if any work can be affirmed of the church as an organic whole. This would require one central earthly head as Romanism or Methodism, and no work would be legitimate that was not suggested and directed by that head. We would then say the proper agents to send out the Gospel are the churches of Christ. Each of these is recognized in the Bible as a full, complete and perfect whole within itself. All the functions, powers, and duties pertaining to any number of churches are present in full force and virtue in every single congregation of disciples. It is a perfect integer, the body of Christ, complete and perfect in every part. All the members of the body of Christ were present in the church of Corinth, at Rome, at Ephesus. Then we know of no work that can be affirmed of the church as embracing the whole number of churches on earth. Indeed, as a whole it cannot engage in a work, save as each church as an independent body

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Why I Cannot Say, Amen!" Gospel Advocate, XXX, No. 10 (March 7, 1888), 6.



does the work God has assigned it. The church universal is not recognized in the Scriptures as a composite, organic, acting, working whole.<sup>1</sup>

### No Organic Union Between Churches

"In primitive times there was not a vestige of organization between the different churches," he asserted.<sup>2</sup> There was not a shadow of any organism or association connecting two or more of these churches in one body. To be sure, Lipscomb agreed, the Savior and his inspired teachers deprecated division, but it was division that might arise within these congregations; they prayed for unity, not between different churches, but within these bodies. Lipscomb believed this to be true because he also believed that

the church of Christ on earth is composed of the churches of Christ scattered abroad, each complete and perfect in itself so far as organism, worship and work are concerned, and entirely independent of every other organism only so far as subjection to a common head, and obedience to a common Divine law, may make them co-workers for the attainment of a common end, and fidelity to a common Master may give them true brotherly sympathy and love one for another.<sup>3</sup>

He had no fear of organic disunion among the churches of Christ because he believed there was no organic union to be broken. He was sure that no union exists among churches of Christ that is dependent upon their will or upon their action or resolution. He wrote:

<sup>1</sup>"Co-operation," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 16 (April 20, 1871), 372.

<sup>2</sup>"Innovations by Bro. Rhoulhac Considered," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 13 (March 19, 1884), 198.

<sup>3</sup>"Arkansas Letter," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 50 (December 10, 1884), 790.

Christ in the intercessory prayer, besought that his disciples might be one, then that all who believed on him through the words of these disciples might be one. Not that the churches might be united in one body and not that they should be one in any general organism. We apprehend that Christ and his Father were not organically one, but one in sentiment, in heart -- working together by the same rule for the same end.<sup>1</sup>

He declared that the Bible says not one word about organic union between congregations. Man attempts to supply the deficiency and create a bond of organic union, and, as Lipscomb commented:

every effort ever made at organic union has resulted in organic disunion. It needs no spirit of prophecy to affirm that every one that shall be made hereafter will produce the same result.

Where there is no organic union, there can be no organic disunion; whoever strives to build up organic union makes sure provision for organic disunion.<sup>2</sup>

The unity, and harmony, and co-operation that God desires among churches and among members of churches, as Lipscomb conceived the matter, is simply obtained, and Lipscomb indicated the simplicity with which it is obtained in the words that follow:

Every man who humbly and faithfully submits to the divine commands and confines himself to divine provisions without an effort or thought on his part, is brought into perfect unity of action and complete harmony of effort, with every other being that is governed by divine law. He is in perfect harmony and union with every church and every member of every church in the world that is obedient to the Lord. He is in perfect co-operation with every soul and every spirit, and all the host of heaven and of earth that is in harmony with God. He is a co-worker, a worker

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<sup>1</sup>"Union, True and False," Gospel Advocate, XXII, No. 24 (June 10, 1880), 374.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

together with God, a co-operant with God, and with all persons, spirits, institutions, laws and influences in harmony with God.<sup>1</sup>

Though sure that God intended no organic union between churches, Lipscomb believed that it was mooted and threatened in Paul's day. To him, it was the "mystery of lawlessness," the machinations of the "lawless one," the "man of sin." It appeared to him that Paul's warning the Thessalonians meant that the evil one would arise among them, would then spread out over the land. Hence the warning to the Ephesian elders, in Acts 20:29. This "lawless one" was to arise within the church -- was of the church -- and his first characteristic is that he is lawless. He disregards law, or acts without or contrary to law. He sits in the temple of God -- the church -- opposing and exalting himself against God, setting himself forth as God.<sup>2</sup> And, as has already been noted, Lipscomb taught that God's first and highest characteristic is that he is governor, ruler, law-maker, and only guide to his church. To make laws for and rule in his kingdom

is the most sacred and jealously guarded prerogative of God, because it lies at the foundation of his claim to be God, and out of this grow all other claims. It requires as great authority to repeal or change a law as it does to enact it; hence, the power that enacts laws for God's people, repeals or changes the law of God, exalts himself into the rival and opponents of God, assumes his most sacred prerogative, occupies his seat, and so sets forth himself as God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Churches Subverted," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 21 (May 27, 1885), 321.

<sup>3</sup>"The Man of Sin," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 28 (July 11, 1901), 440.

Lipscomb presented a quotation from the historian, Mosheim, which, because of its bearing on Lipscomb's views of the church, is incorporated in this work. Mosheim said:

During a great part of this (2nd) century the Christian churches were independent with respect to each other, but in process of time, all the Christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states. . . . These ecclesiastical associations were not long confined to the Greeks. These councils of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of this (2nd) century, changed the whole face of the church and gave it a new form, for by them the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished, and the authority and power of the bishops greatly augmented. The humility, indeed, and prudence of these pious prelates, prevented their assuming, all at once, the power with which they were afterward invested. At their first appearance in these general councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches, and they acted in the name, and by the appointment of the people. But they soon changed their humble tone; imperceptibly extended the limits of their authority; turned their influence into dominion, and their councils into laws, and openly asserted, at length, that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people authoritative rules of faith and manners.

"This," Lipscomb declared, "is the only development from within the church of any organized power that meets the character of the prophecy."<sup>1</sup>

He insisted that these councils, from the beginning, were without Divine warrant, and since they had no authority to exist, they were without law as to the end they should accomplish, or the manner in which they should work. They

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<sup>1</sup>"Churches Subverted," loc. cit.

were lawless -- without law to God. "Their very existence," he wrote, "is a declaration that the church no longer looks to God as its only guide, but this power in the church has assumed the place and authority of God as the source of authority in the church."<sup>1</sup> For Lipscomb then, the man of sin is the personification of the principle in the church that legislates for the church, that changes the laws, the order of God. He who does this supplants God as the only Lawmaker and Ruler, occupies his place, and exercises the prerogatives that belong to God.<sup>2</sup> All the organizations, institutions, and practices in the church that grow out of the exercise of this power by man or men were, for Lipscomb, developments of the man of sin. He thought that some one body, by preeminence in time or power, may be called the "man of sin," but all are of the same family, even though less pronounced in character. Lipscomb could not confine this principle to one church or to one development, for he saw it in many and varied growths, each shaped by the conditions and surroundings of its growth. "Wherever and whenever men in the church have added to, taken from, or changed the laws, institutions, or order God has ordained, there the man of sin is at work, as he was in Paul's day."<sup>3</sup> From this he concluded:

The germinal seed of all the institutions and acts of rebellion against God, is the idea that we are not

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"The Man of Sin," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

tied to the ways for work, taught in the examples and precepts of the apostles, but may modify them somewhat according to human wisdom. This has been the power that has wrecked every effort to return to the primitive ways and order of the church, from the first apostacy that began in Greece during the life of Paul, down to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb asserted that God left the churches as distinct congregations, connected with each other only by bonds of love and faith. The office of the congregation was, through the ordinances and teachings, to bring man into close, constant contact with God, and cultivate a sense of personal responsibility and nearness to him. This condition, Lipscomb believed, will bring out all that is best in a man and will stir him to zeal in the service of God, but an organization added to this arrangement comes between and separates man from God, makes his service a proxy service, destroys his sense of accountability to God and inevitably weakens his zeal and devotion.<sup>2</sup> He pointed out, further, that the apostles represent the churches almost immediately and universally as falling into a state of cold, lifeless indifference to religion, torn by dissensions and divisions and fostering immorality and godlessness. And yet these apostles and the Spirit of God that guided them depended upon instructions and letters to correct them, as the one thing needful to cure all these evils. Chidingly, he wrote:

How dull, how lacking in common sense these old apostles, and the Spirit of God that guided them were!

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<sup>1</sup>"Churches Subverted," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"Man of Sin," loc. cit.



The Spirit of God and the apostles were not only so foolish as to fail to see the weakness was because of deficient organization, system and government, but they were so foolish as to vainly think the failure arose from lack of zeal, devotion and fidelity to the law and Spirit of the Christian religion. And they wasted their time and talent in chiding them for the loss of zeal -- the cooling of their first love, their earnest devotion, and their ardor in carrying the gospel to the lost, and in trying to stir them to a renewal of their first love to God.

All the epistles of the New Testament were written to complete the knowledge, correct the morals, renew the devotion of the early disciples and guide them in the paths and methods of service that are pleasing to the Lord. From these we learn the state of affairs, and things needed, and in all these there is not a word in reference to any system or organization or government either in existence or needed save the simple congregation of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

### The Infallibility of the Church

Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 3:15 that the church of God is "the pillar and ground of the truth" brought forth the comment from Lipscomb that

this means, the church is the foundation and support of the truth, not that it is the author of the truth, or that the church has the right to determine what is truth, or modify and change the truth of God.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier, he had stated quite positively, "We are strong believers in the infallibility of God's Church,"<sup>3</sup> and "The true Church of God also puts in its claim to infallibility."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"What Is Needed to Keep Alive and Spread the Church of God," Gospel Advocate, XXXIII, No. 26 (July 1, 1891), 404.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church of God the Ground and Pillar of the Truth," Gospel Advocate, XXII, No. 11 (March 11, 1880), 169.

<sup>3</sup>"An Infallible Church," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 9 (March 4, 1869), 193.

<sup>4</sup>"Infallibility -- What It Does and Does Not Mean," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 32 (August 11, 1870), 753.

He explained these statements in harmony with the comment above. The true church, he wrote,

denies all infallibility as inhering in the person or the church, and places it only in God, and in his word, which rules and guides the church. . . . God is infallible. It inheres in him alone. It is an assumption of the prerogative that belongs to God alone for any man or body of men to claim infallibility, save as they attain it through adherence to his will. The individual or church that so distrusts its own powers, faculties or privileges, that is so conscious of its own infirmity, frailty and weakness, as to be led by God and his word, adding nothing to and subtracting nothing from his appointments, is by virtue of this self-distrust, and this confidence in God truly and surely the only infallible and safe church.<sup>1</sup>

He affirmed that God has given the truth to the world, and has established the church for the purpose of upholding, maintaining, practicing and propagating that truth in its purity in the world. Its duty is to do it both by precept and example. Significantly he stated,

The church, fulfilling its mission, is an exhibition of a society such as the world would be, if it was what God desired it to be. He proposes to convert the world by showing them in the example of the church how much better that world would be if it, like the church, would live by the truth, or be governed by God.<sup>2</sup>

It is at this point that Lipscomb's views of the relation sustained by the Christian to the various world powers becomes pertinent.

#### The Church and World Powers

With Dr. Carroll Kendrick of Bastrop, Texas, in 1866,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church of God the Ground and Pillar of the Truth," loc. cit.

Lipscomb discussed the question, "What relationship does the church of Christ sustain to the world-governments by which it is surrounded; and to what extent may Christians engage in the affairs of worldly governments?" Emphatically Lipscomb expressed himself:

We certainly say some relationship exists between these institutions. Some kind of relationship must exist between all institutions that come in contact -- one of harmony or antagonism. We certainly understand that the church sustains a relationship, well and clearly defined by the Sacred Scriptures, to the world governments. We also understand that the Christian man owes certain specific and positive duties and obligations to the government under which he lives; and as a Christian he must perform these duties, or forfeit his claims to be a Christian.<sup>1</sup>

But, while believing in a relationship between the church and world governments in which the Christian owes duties and obligations to the government, he also believed "that the object, destiny, work, and character of the two are so antagonistic that no individual can at once enter into, sustain, drink into the spirit of, and operate both at the same time."<sup>2</sup> From the Old Testament, with its record of God's dealings with the Jews, Lipscomb learned what he considered a very important lesson in this connection. That lesson was that alliances with the human government on the part of Jews ever brought confusion and woe. The contact between the two was ever one of persecution or corruption; the friendship of the world-governments was always more fatal to the people of God than their enmity.

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<sup>1</sup>"C. Kendrick's Reply to D. Lipscomb," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 3 (January 17, 1867), 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Lipscomb declared:

There is not a principle of God's dealings with his people, under the Jewish dispensation more clearly marked, more deeply stamped upon every page of the Old Testament Scriptures, than that of total, entire and perpetual separation from all associations, alliances and affiliations, with those choosing to<sup>1</sup> govern themselves, rather than let God govern them.

He understood that man has no power to rule himself. All power and rule must come from God or the devil. He figured, then, that every institution of earth, intended to control man, not founded of God must look back through man, the agent, to the wicked one, the Prince of the world, as the source from which it sprang. And, as he taught, Jesus Christ came into this world to rescue the world from the dominion of the wicked one, and bring it back to its allegiance to his Father. The question Lipscomb sought to answer was, How will he effect this? Will he do it, he wondered, by infusing his spirit and introducing his subjects into the kingdoms of the world until he is able to out-vote and control the world through the kingdoms of the wicked one? Or, by destroying the kingdoms of the wicked one and establishing in their stead a kingdom of his own? It was inconceivable to Lipscomb that God could rule in and animate a kingdom that has his enemy and rival for its founder. He believed that God's character and dignity require that he should destroy the works and institutions established under the inspiration of the wicked one, and establish a kingdom of his own, in and through which he will

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<sup>1</sup>"Church of Christ and World Power," Gospel Advocate, VIII, No. 7 (February 13, 1866), 102.

rule the world.<sup>1</sup> And, returning to the prophecy of Daniel 2: 44, 45, Lipscomb understood this to be its exact teaching -- the object of God in establishing his church or government was to destroy all the governments and institutions of man, and through his church, and only through it, rule and control the world. And he argued that

the church's relationship to the world-powers and institutions of man must be in harmony with this -- its chiefest mission. It cannot be one of alliance with and support to any of these institutions. It cannot, at one and the same time, both uphold and destroy an institution. Its first mission is to destroy all authority and power and rule and bring the world in subjection to its great King.

.....  
The Kingdom of Heaven will destroy all these earthly kingdoms and so engross the feelings, affections, time and labors of the denizens of earth, that no room or place will be found for the service of the earthly kingdoms. They are perishing. "It shall stand forever." The obligations, and duties of the members of the Church of Christ, can in no manner conflict with this prime work and mission of the church itself. They cannot uphold what it must destroy. In doing this they war against the Church, for it is through its members that the church accomplishes her work. If we thwart the workings of God's church, we fight against God himself.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Kendrick objected to Lipscomb's views, declaring that when Jesus said "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," he evidently admitted that something is due from us to the civil government and he teaches us that we should perform our duty to the rulers of the world in which we live as well as render to God the service, obedience and worship due him.

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<sup>1</sup>"Church of Christ and World Powers," Gospel Advocate, VIII, No. 8 (March 6, 1866), 144.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., No. 9 (February 27, 1866), 128.

Lipscomb replied that he would alter this expression by saying that Jesus evidently has ordained that something is due from us to the civil government represented by Caesar, and he teaches that we should perform our duties to the rulers of the world in which we live as a part of the service, obedience and worship due to God. He continued:

We as Christians owe service to Caesar because God has required it at our hands. What he has required we should conscientiously and scrupulously perform as if performed to God himself. It is a part of our service to God. But we owe no duty, that God has not required. Now the question is what has he required? He has required submission to all things not violative of his law. But support further than passive submission tends to support, we have never been able to find required or authorized in the Bible either by precept or example.<sup>1</sup>

That this was in complete harmony with God's intention as stated in Daniel 2:44, 45, Lipscomb fully believed, for he stated:

A kingdom can not be sustained by submission merely. It must have active supporters. If the church does not furnish these, every member converted to Christ, is taken from among the active supporters and placed among the passive submissionists. Every convert is taken out of the perishing kingdoms of earth and placed within the kingdom of God. Every convert weakens the one and strengthens the other. The mission of the church with reference to these kingdoms is thus accomplished. But as it now goes, the converts to Christ weaken these kingdoms none -- but those who engage in politics in a narrow and a low or a wide and exalted sphere, weaken the church much.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, his understanding and explanation of Paul's statement in Romans 13:1-7 also furnishes support to

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<sup>1</sup>"Politics and Christianity," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 15 (April 10, 1873), 339.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 347.



his line of reasoning. He suggested that it is an error to think, as is common, that all of God's ministers are good. He believed that God's ministers are in character fitted for the work he appoints them to do, and gave, as examples, Judas Iscariot to betray the Savior, Nebuchadrezzar to punish the disobedient Jews, the devil to execute wrath and vengeance on the finally impenitent, Jesus to minister salvation to the humble and true in the world to come, Christians as ministers to do works of love and mercy, and the wicked and rebellious to execute wrath on those who do evil. He explained it more fully as follows:

As God ordains ministers for wrath as well as for mercy, he ordains institutions of wrath as well as institutions of mercy.

He ordains an institution of mercy -- His Church -- and asks the world to enter, do mercy and receive mercy. Those who accept the invitation act and live in it. It is ordained for them. But for those who refuse to enter and become ministers of mercy, he ordains institutions fitted for their rebellious character in which they work, while rejecting God's institution of mercy for his children. These institutions of wrath God ordains for wrath; they will be destroyed after serving their purpose here. People build them up unconscious that God is ordaining them for the destruction of the builders -- of those refusing his government of mercy.

God ordains for people just such institutions as they deserve. If they are obedient and submissive, his merciful government is their heritage. If they refuse to obey God's government, he ordains they shall be governed by the oppressive rule of man's own governments, of which the devil is the great head. Hence God ordains these governments of wrath for the children of wrath. They are not ordained for the purpose or the people for which God ordains his church.<sup>1</sup>

He concluded, then, that the powers Paul referred to

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<sup>1</sup>"The Powers That Be -- Who Are They?," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 31 (August 5, 1869), 724.

are civil or political powers; they are ordained as instruments of wrath for the children of wrath, to be conducted and operated by the ministers of wrath and their destiny will be a destruction of fierce wrath. He believed that God's children must submit to them as such, not strive by violence to destroy them, and that when they are no longer needed God will destroy them, perhaps by causing them to destroy and eat up one another. So he reasoned that "no Christian can become a partaker or participator or partizan of them lest he partake of their woes; quiet, passive submission that involves no violation of the laws of the spiritual kingdom, is the measure and limit of their connection with them."<sup>1</sup>

When he was criticized as being inconsistent for saying it is the duty of man to submit to the human government as a duty he owes to God, and at the same time saying it is of the evil one, he met the charge in these words:

Unreasonable as it may appear it is true that in heaven and earth, God's servants, as a duty they owe God are required to submit to much that is evil and to many institutions that are in rebellion against God.

God, to retain their fealty pure to himself requires it to be done as service to him, not to the human institution. The Christian owes no allegiance, no fealty to the human institution. He owes it to God. God says submit to the human. The Christian then submits and performs the duties as required by God. If this be an inconsistency, it is one running through the whole realm of spiritual beings.<sup>2</sup>

Lipscomb read his Bible and the history of the church

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> "Reply to Bro. Lipscomb's Long Article on Politics and Voting," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 32 (August 17, 1876), 797.

and he could only believe that a Christian has no business in politics even as he has no business serving the prince of this world -- building up the kingdom of the evil one.<sup>1</sup> The histories which he read showed him that the purest days of the church -- when its most effective and successful work in spreading the religion of Christ was done -- were when the civil powers persecuted the church and when the disciples of Christ were wholly separated from all affiliation with, and participation in, the human governments and organizations. He saw that as the Christians multiplied in numbers and increased in wealth the human governments sought their favor and offered alliance with them. The Christians accepted the offer, became worldly and sought the honors and emoluments of office and place in the human governments, brought the spirit of the governments into the church and destroyed its purity and zeal. Lipscomb was sure that "the church will never be the pure and zealous body it should be until Christians cease to affiliate in the civil government, and give an undivided service to the church of God."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps as good a statement as could be found from Lipscomb's pen dealing with the role of the church in the world is the optimistic one which follows:

The separation between the children of the wicked one and the servants of the Most High is every day growing wider and more apparent.

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<sup>1</sup>"Words of Caution," Gospel Advocate, XXII, No. 26 (June 24, 1880), 405.

<sup>2</sup>"Worldliness in the Churches," Gospel Advocate, XLIV, No. 23 (June 5, 1902), 361.

This is an end absolutely essential to the success of righteousness and truth. Hitherto the commingling of the moral and religious with the political and with human works in society, has prevented either from having its free and perfect work. When good has been gained it was a question of doubt, whether religion or politics, whether the church or the world was entitled to the credit of it. When evil came that evil alike afflicted the church and the world. Neither was proof against evil that afflicted the other. Man could see no superiority of the one above the other. Hence the church is no better than the world. All the elements of evil that are in the world are brought into the church.

But as the separation is made, each progresses in its own sphere and direction, the world in wickedness and corruption, the church becomes truer, purer, better. When the separation is more complete, the church alone will receive the benefits of its own strength and the world must alone bear the burdens of its evil and weakness. The world will then be benefited by the church, only by entering into the church and becoming a part of the church in contradistinction to the world. This work will continue in two ways until there ceases to be a world away from the church. One of these ways, is, the church separated from the world, freed from its corrupting, weakening, and demoralizing principles, which are brought into the church through the joint participation of its members in the church and in the institutions of the world, will grow purer and purer, more singlehearted in its service, more zealous and faithful in presenting an undivided fealty and an unbroken homage to the Lord, will attract by the beauty of holiness the better portion of the world to itself. Thus by the gentleness of love and practical truth a portion of the world will be brought to Christ. The remaining portion of the world, as evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, will grow more wicked; more hardened in sin, until God in his providence will cause them to consume and destroy each other. This progress forward, is sometimes introduced by retrograde movements, sometimes it leads through dark valleys of strife and under clouds of fury and desolation. While wicked men and wicked institutions grow bolder in their wickedness they strip themselves of their sources of strength by separating from them the good with which they have formerly been allied.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Study of the Bible," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 23 (June 8, 1871), 540-543.

## Identifying Marks of the Church

In 1882 there appeared to be some possibility of a discussion taking place between some member of the church of Christ and a representative of the Roman Catholic Church and some correspondence relative to this appeared in the Gospel Advocate. After it became unlikely that such would occur, Lipscomb reviewed some of the claims that had been set forth by Mr. P. V. Hickey, editor of the Catholic Review, of New York. One was that the Romish church is the apostolic church. Mr. Hickey had said: "If Christ founded a church, it ought to have certain signs by which it might be known as his church." Lipscomb agreed, but asked what those signs are -- external continuity or conformity to the model given? He suggested that if the answer is external continuity, then the Jews are the only true people of God. But the Jews erred in relying on fleshly descent to establish their claims as God's people, for Paul showed that circumcision that is outward in the flesh does not indicate the true children of Abraham. Only they are accounted the seed who have Abraham's faith and follow in Abraham's obedience. "Thus," Lipscomb said,

if a church could be found that could prove itself founded by Christ or Peter himself, and an unbroken continuity of existence could be shown, as clear even as the connection of the Jew with Abraham, it would no more prove that church now to be a church of Christ than the descent of the Jew from Abraham proves that Jew to be a child of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Romanism -- Its Claim," Gospel Advocate, XXIV, No. 19 (May 11, 1882), 292.

It is not the outward circumcision, nor the regular fleshly descent through successive generations, Lipscomb argued, but the faith that makes us keep the commandments of God as Abraham kept them that shows we are children of God, the true children of Abraham. So, it is not a regular succession of church existence from the apostles or Christ that makes the church apostolic or Christian -- it is conformity to the divine model.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb used God's statement made through Jeremiah with reference to the Jewish nation and its corruption, as a type of the church. God said: "I planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me," and from this Lipscomb made the observation that a succession of plants kept up produces in a few generations quite a different plant from the original, "a degenerate plant of a strange vine." "There is but one way to keep the plant up to its original character," he wrote. "That is by frequent recurrence to the undegenerate seed, from its native home."<sup>2</sup> That seed of the divine institution in Judaism as now, was the word of God. In Judaism, the people often wandered far from God and forfeited Divine favor, but when they found the word of God, took that word into their hearts, and covenanted to live according to its requirements, they were accounted to be the Israel of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"The Claims of Romanism," Gospel Advocate, XXV, No. 30 (July 25, 1883), 470.



God. Lipscomb continued:

The Christian religion is not indigenous to the air or soil of earth. A church planted here deteriorates. Every church ever planted on earth has deteriorated, has apostatized. We do not believe there is a church on earth but will apostatize, deteriorate, in the atmosphere of sin that surrounds it. Any attempt at perpetuity of existence would result in a degenerate and corrupted church.

As a rule, then, the church that has maintained an unchanged continuity of existence longest, is the most corrupt, and has gone into the darkest apostasy. The plant that has been perpetuated longest in an unfavorable atmosphere, is the most degenerate. The only way to maintain the church in its true, uncorrupted state, is as one degenerates and apostatizes, to plant anew the incorruptible seed, the word of God, that was matured in the atmosphere of heaven. Those who recur back to this seed most frequently, and start anew from the divine seed, is [sic] the truest type of the church of God as God would have it.<sup>1</sup>

He was not perturbed, then, when questions were directed to him such as: "Has there been a period since the days of the apostles that God's church has not been in existence?" "If not, under what name, or names (denominational), has it been perpetuated?" "What Christian organization did God acknowledge as his people during the last eighteen hundred years?" Lipscomb calmly replied that Christ's people never willingly wore a denominational name -- that when a religious people become a denomination, they cease by that act to be God's people.<sup>2</sup> As has already been shown, he taught that the church is simply a congregation of believers in Christ, separated from the world by his word and keeping the ordinances as they

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> "The Church of Christ," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 40 (October 9, 1873), 974-980.

were delivered. Each congregation is separate and without organic connection with another. He found them thus represented both in the New Testament and in early church history. He believed -- and so stated -- that the church of Christ has never in its purity been found as a denomination or consolidation or confederation of individual churches in one body or organization. But he also believed that God's family of worshipers in some of its many developments did maintain an existence through the centuries, although he admitted the difficulty in presenting the clear, plain proof for every period of time.<sup>1</sup> He suggested several reasons why this proof is difficult.

First, the churches were often composed of illiterate people who did not write; again, their books and teachings were destroyed by their enemies; and, their teaching is frequently hard to identify because the records coming to us concerning that teaching were made by their enemies and persecutors, who would not do them justice; or, because they were persecuted, oftentimes driven and scattered from one country -- hiding in mountain fastnesses, avoiding publicity, seeking a place of toleration -- they are now hard to trace, yet they often lived in this condition and while doing so constituted the true churches of Christ on earth.<sup>2</sup>

Another, and perhaps greater, difficulty comes from

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the fact that there are periods when changes were going on within the churches themselves. A church, or number of churches, pure at the start, gradually becomes corrupt. Some protest and object but do not break off from the corrupted church immediately. There is a time when the two contending parties are in the same church. Frequently the evil worked the good out of the existing body and maintained possession of the old body -- that which is called organization. The good and true must start anew, develop a new body. For this reason it is difficult to identify the true body as a fixed body. Yet it was there in vigorous existence as the contest shows. The good element may, by strength of the old association, remain within the old long after the body is perverted to sustaining the evil, and will, only when these are hopelessly perverted, form the nucleus of new and true churches of God. In the act of transition it may be difficult to define the limits of the true church.<sup>1</sup> Of this Lipscomb

wrote at length:

We have studied this question carefully, and find it difficult to draw a line and say all on this side are churches of Christ, all on that are not. We believe that a church that tries faithfully to follow the law of Christ, not consciously adopting another rule, is recognized by God as a church of Christ. But this rule allows a wide margin for diversity in these churches. According to this rule two churches may practice precisely the same things, one be a church of Christ, the other not. One practices a thing because the members honestly believe it the requirement of the Lord and are doing the thing to obey God. The others practice it because they believe it a wise invention of man. One is loyal to God in heart, the other is not.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

If they continue loyal in heart, seeking to know and do the will of God they will become loyal in life. Sometimes people occupy the same point, one going in one direction, the other the opposite. Two churches may practice the same things precisely. One of them is on its way out of darkness, apostasy and sin, led by a desire to obey the word of God. The other is on its way from the truth going back into sin and rebellion led by a devotion to human wisdom. Practicing precisely the same thing, the one is an approved church of God, the other is in rebellion. So when you look for a church permanent and unchangeable in its fidelity and character, you look for what does not pertain to humanity.<sup>1</sup>

And yet another difficulty, Lipscomb noted, is that no church is perfectly pure.<sup>2</sup> None ever has been, he asserted; none ever will be. Just as the church of Christ does not consist of organized denominations, neither does it consist in bodies of sinless worshipers. He was sure that

God recognizes every church and every individual, no matter how little of his word they may know, as his church and his child who are honestly striving to learn and to do his will, and if they continue faithful to his word they will be led into the full light of his teachings. I have no doubt, that though a church or an individual may exist in a comparative fullness of the knowledge and practice of his ordinances, if they in heart determine to follow their own judgment and will instead of his law, he then sets aside and rejects that church and that individual as his church or child. Oftentimes in a church that is coming forward in the truth there are individuals that in heart and spirit are holding back. They are rejected by God while the church as a whole is accepted. I have no doubt when a church as a whole starts backward individuals within that church remain loyal and are accepted of God, while the church is rejected.

These individuals loyal to God may remain in these apostatizing churches, so long as they are allowed to be true to God in these churches. So long as they are

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<sup>1</sup>"Church Continuity," Gospel Advocate, XXXI, No. 19 (May 8, 1889), 294.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church of Christ," loc. cit.

not compelled to countenance, fellowship, approve some worship or service, that is not of God, then they must come out from them on pain of their own rejection by God.<sup>1</sup>

He also affirmed:

We are by no means sure there were not a people two hundred years ago called disciples of Christ, just as we are called disciples of Christ. It is just barely possible that we take more credit to ourselves than we are entitled to. We are not sure there are not people found at this day in the world who possibly have never heard of us -- practicing fully as perfectly as we do -- the teachings of the apostles, who have existed an indefinite number of years, reaching back into the dark ages.

There are others who while failing in some points, possess, doubtless other points of conformity to apostolic practice, that would put our pretensions to shame, which congregations reach back to the Middle Ages and whose origin is lost in the depths of antiquity. Yet they are not organized bodies or denominations and claim nothing like organic succession. We have yet to learn that this constitutes any part of the characteristics of the churches of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

He was fully convinced that whenever a people learn the truth of God, plant the seed of the kingdom, the word of God, in their heart, and it bears fruit by bringing forth humble, trusting obedience in their lives, there is a true church of God. "It is the production of the divine seed; hence is true and accepted fruit," he declared.<sup>3</sup>

Lipscomb had no confidence then in age or continuity of existence as identifying features of the church of Christ. That would not be an accurate measurement, in any case. He

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<sup>1</sup>"Church Continuity," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church of Christ," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

concluded:

We cannot find the church of Christ in any distinct and perpetual organization. Nor can any one rely upon being in the church of Christ on account of membership in any organic body, no matter how old. He must see that it is practicing according to the word of God. I believe churches so practicing, with more or less of purity and fidelity, can be found at any and all periods since the establishment of the church on Pentecost.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Church Continuity," loc. cit.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

#### The Church is a Growth

We have been satisfied fully that the local church or a number of local churches is the only manifestation of a church or the only thing recognized as a church or churches of God on earth. The "church universal," as it is called, exists on earth only in and through the local church. It is addressed only through the local church; it is commanded only through commands given to the local church; it can be approached only through the local church; it is manifested on earth only through the local church. Nothing is done or can be done by the church universal, save as it is done through the local church or churches. Through them alone its life is manifested or its existence known. They embody its only existence on earth. Whatever is not done by or through the local church in its legitimate action is not done by the church universal. While this is true, it might have been supposed that the church local, which is the pillar and support of the truth, would have been clearly defined as to its numbers and geographical limits. But of this almost nothing is said.

We have studied the question with care as to what constitutes a church of God according to the Scriptures. We reached the conclusion that one single individual in a community, worshipping God according to his appointments, embodies all the essential elements of a church of God. He is called out, separated from the world, consecrated to God in life, and, observing his ordinances, he constitutes a church of God. We remember some years ago taking this position in the presence of Brother Fall. He dissented so far as to say it took two individuals to constitute a church of God. If there are other servants of God in the community, it is their duty to meet together to encourage, strengthen, and help one another; but as to the distance they should come to worship together, we have never found an intimation in the Bible. . . . .  
I would, then, define a scriptural church to be the

disciple or disciples of Christ in a community who shape their lives according to his teachings and keep his ordinances as he delivered them in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb observed that the first such church at Jerusalem, under Divine directions, engaged in regular assembly worship which included the study of apostolic teaching, breaking bread, fellowship and prayers. They also worshiped from house to house daily. And in addition to the worship they saw to the wants of the poor, looked after disciplinary matters, and taught those with whom they came in contact. Even when, under persecution, the church was scattered abroad, they went everywhere preaching the word. With this example of the original church Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:11, 12 accords, for he says: "And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering; unto the building up of the body of Christ." These, Lipscomb asserted, were spiritual gifts bestowed on the church before the completion of revelation, to guide the church in the fulfillment of its work. It was his belief that these gifts guided the church to do exactly what the Spirit now commands the church to do.<sup>2</sup> He regarded the New Testament as the collection of the teaching given by those inspired men

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<sup>1</sup>David Lipscomb, "Constitution and Order of Churches," Questions Answered, ed. M. C. Kurfees (Nashville, Tenn.: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1921), pp. 122-124.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church -- Its Work," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 13 (April 1, 1885), 198.

to effect these ends, and held that the same teaching now found in the New Testament, if obeyed, would make the church precisely the same in its organization, worship and work as it was when directed by those inspired men of God.<sup>1</sup>

The word "organization" in reference to the church should be here modified, for Lipscomb preferred to think of the church, not as an organization but as a growth. He wrote:

It (the church) is compared to a body, a plant, a vine, a tree. But we never talk of organizing a human body, a tree, or a vine. The body is a growth. The seed is planted. The seed contains the germs and the embryo of the body, with all its organs and fruits. The seed is brought into favorable conditions; and it, with all its organs, grows until all becomes a full-grown body with all its organs. Just so it seems to me of the church. It in all its members and organs must grow and attain its growth and maturity. The church is a growth. The church grows by each member growing in its place and work. That is the way the body grows and the church is the body of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This should prove helpful in our further study because the form and function of the church, for Lipscomb, was just as clear and natural as the shape and growth of a tree.

In this same connection he pointed out that the body grows by taking the food needed for its growth and strength, then by taking the exercise needed to assimilate the food to the needs of the different members of the body. But it was obvious to him that there are Christians who are lean, and hungry, and sickly, and he was sure that it was the result of not partaking of the spiritual food God has prepared for his

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> "Queries," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 3 (January 17, 1907), 41.

children. And the reason they have no appetite for spiritual food is that they take no spiritual exercise; they do no spiritual work. He reasoned that

the desire for spiritual work is created by a consideration of what Christ has done for us. That desire is directed to a full and active development by the teaching of scripture. The work to be done is similar to the work which Christ did in the world. It is the same work that Christ would do were he now in the world. Its spirit is self-denial for the good of man. It will manifest itself in works of benevolence to the poor, the needy, the suffering, in presenting salvation through Christ to the sorrowing, the sinning, the lost outcasts of earth. This is the Christ-work, that inspires the Christ-development, excites the spiritual appetite that craves spiritual food which is found only in the broken body and shed blood of Christ our Savior, our Lord, our Redeemer and our sin-offering. But food and labor act and react on each other. Labor excites the appetite for food. Food -- good, healthy, suitable food, gives strength to labor.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb believed that all who come into the church of Christ must be, to a greater or lesser extent, imbued with the Spirit of Christ. The word of God has found lodgment in the heart and imbued it with something of its nature in bearing fruit in obedience. A sense of the lost condition of man, the desire for salvation for himself and the human family, an anxiety to obey and honor God must exist in the heart as accompaniments of that obedience that brings a man into the church of God. He insisted:

It is a misnomer, a wrong name, to call a body of people with no mission to save sinners a church of Christ or of God. A church of Christ is a body of people in which Christ's Spirit dwells. It is a slander on

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<sup>1</sup>"Labor and Enjoyment," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 18 (May 4, 1871), 409.

Christ and his Spirit to say they dwell within a body that is not anxious and working to save souls and to honor God.<sup>1</sup>

With such feelings and urgings as these, the person seeks to know God's will, but the special direction of the action which it stirs in the heart depends upon the qualities of the man's heart. Certainly it excites in every heart a desire to do the work of God, to perfect its own Christian life and help others do the same, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, minister to those in prison, care for the widow and fatherless, to preach the "glad tidings" of salvation to the lost. In other words, Lipscomb was saying that there is more to obedience to Christ than to believe in him, repent toward God and be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Baptism is the embodiment of faith in the burial and resurrection of Christ and is the act indicative of submission to the control of that faith. The Lord's Supper is the shewing forth his death till he comes again. It is the embodied manifestation of the facts on which Christian faith rests.

Submission to these institutions is not work. At the Lord's table we eat. Eating strengthens us for work, for doing true spiritual work in relieving the afflicted, doing good to the needy, lifting up the fallen and pointing the sinning to the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Work, true spiritual work, gives us vigor and keen, craving appetite for spiritual food. It makes us anxious for the Lord's day, with the table of life-giving elements, which compose the Lord's supper. Faith and works, food and labor are inseparably connected and essential to growth in grace and true spiritual holiness.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Are We Christians?," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 16 (April 18, 1907), 249.

<sup>2</sup>"Labor and Enjoyment," loc. cit.



Lipscomb believed that no man can possibly be fitted for an entrance into the church of Christ without imbibing a desire for these works. For that reason he warned his brethren to "be cautious never to bring a person into the church until the impression has been fully made that he must work and sacrifice for the cause."<sup>1</sup> He recognized, however, that a desire for one work will be developed more strongly in one, for another work in another, according to the natural taste or quality of the heart. Each, he knew, works most successfully and earnestly in the direction that his natural inclinations lead. And his belief was that the word of God or the Spirit of God does not change the natural inclination, but simply directs, guides, consecrates and excites them to activity.<sup>2</sup> He suggested further that under this excitement the members will go to work -- one will be led to counsel and advise with the weak and erring and to encourage and help them in the Christian life, another will be led to look after the poor in a quiet, unostentatious way, and yet another will be found teaching the ignorant, talking to the lost and pointing them to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He concluded:

Here are the embryo characters, the rudimentary manifestation of the characters essential to the three distinct works of the bishops, deacons and evangelists. . . . Any appointment to "office" in the church, that

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<sup>1</sup>"Letter from Bro. Adams," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 5 (February 3, 1876), 102.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church -- How It Works," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 16 (April 22, 1885), 241.



runs counter to or disregards these characteristics, is a burlesque on church organism and guarantees failure in church work. A true, unquenchable "desire" for a work is the first, highest and necessary qualification for it in the sight of God. It is clear that in the bestowal of spiritual gifts regard was had to this desire or taste, "as every man hath received the gift even so let him minister the same as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."<sup>1</sup>

### The Overseership

"He that desires overseeing desires a good work."

Lipscomb stated bluntly that the man who has no desire for any of this work is simply not a Christian. He believed that elders should be appointed in every church, but he preferred that the appointment be made informally simply by all recognizing the fitness of some who have grown into the work. He considered this the best appointment because it is the spontaneous and unbiased judgment of all.<sup>2</sup> And when the work is satisfactorily done, he believed that any interference or other appointment is only conducive to confusion and will prevent rather than promote the work. He wrote:

One who, by natural bent of mind is active, devoted, assumes responsibility, and is a natural leader, when these talents are consecrated to God, will alone do this work. Where there is a natural and voluntary growth of the proper man into this position it is more certain to be properly done than otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> "Spiritual Gifts," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 29 (July 18, 1901), 456.

<sup>3</sup> "Laying On of Hands and Ordination," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 40 (October 13, 1870), 937.

Of course he believed that it is right to do just exactly what was done in apostolic times -- to appoint men to do neglected work -- but he felt that it is only when things are wanting or lacking that a formal appointment is needed.<sup>1</sup> When this is the condition, then he deemed it the duty of the members to look out among them persons with the qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit. The responsibility of the members, though, he held, is only to testify as to the qualifications. Those qualified are appointed by God to do the work.<sup>2</sup>

#### Authority of Elders.

Lipscomb saw some things troubling the church in its work in this connection, the chief of which was that the eldership has been ignored and depreciated until neither they nor the church respect their position, and the members even refuse to work with them or be advised and led by them. There can never be any harmony in work in the body of Christ, he warned, unless there is some recognized body to lead in this work -- some head to whom the members will defer. He asserted that God has made the eldership under Christ the leaders and rulers of the church, and until they are so recognized and honored there can be no unity or harmony in work.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>"The Elders, and The Lord's Supper," Gospel Advocate, XLIV, No. 15 (April 10, 1902), 233.

<sup>2</sup>"Spiritual Gifts," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>"Elders' and Churches' Duty," Gospel Advocate, XXXIV, No. 9 (March 3, 1892), 133.

elders, or bishops (for Lipscomb used these terms interchangeably, regarding them simply as descriptive of the various works of the overseers), are undershepherds who work under and receive their authority from the chief Shepherd, to whom they must give account. The authority that the elders receive is not from the church, but from God, and because he felt that this is a fact too often and too easily forgotten, Lipscomb was averse to the observance of any ritualistic forms and ceremonies in the appointment of elders. He believed that in nine cases out of ten the authoritative investiture of improper persons in office only chokes off those naturally adapted to the work and destroys the life and activity of the church. "The sanction and authority of the church," he declared, "ought to be lost sight of in our effort to find the sanction and authority of God."<sup>1</sup> Lipscomb's columns contained much on the subject of the authority of the elders, and the following quotation is typical of his remarks:

The church can give the elders no authority. The church is not the source of authority for elders or other Christians. The authority the elders possess is from God. They must be guided in all things by the word of God. Neither the elders nor the church can set this law aside. One elder following the law of God has more authority as the servant of God than a dozen elders and a hundred members without the law. Difference and division between elders, if they are striving to do their duty, is a difference as to the requirements of the Bible. The way to remove the difference is not by vote of the elders or the members, but by studying and learning the will of God. No elder or elders ought to enforce a decision by their authority -- that would be to lord it over God's heritage. They should seek to enforce it as the will

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<sup>1</sup>"Laying On of Hands and Ordination," loc. cit.

of God, by his authority, and, in complying with the law, serve as ensamples to the flock of God. Personal feelings and preferences should be kept out when difficulties are to be settled, and in such cases the only question asked: What is the law of God? When this is done, it will not often be the case that disagreements on vital matters will exist.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb believed that elders of a congregation may inquire into cases of disorder, but they should always submit their decision to the congregation and never act upon it without satisfying every member of the justness of it. He did not believe in authoritative action of the "officers" without the concurrence of the membership.<sup>2</sup> Neither did he believe in mere majorities overriding and overruling minorities by force of numbers. "Whenever a church determines to decide questions by majorities, it throws off the rule of Christ Jesus, and ceases to be a church of Jesus Christ," he wrote.<sup>3</sup>

Lipscomb suggested that overseeing is really an employment or a work and not an office. It is a work in which any may engage, but which is especially assigned to certain ones on account of fitness of character and aptitude for the work. "All the authority they possess," he went on, "in any matter is the moral weight their wisdom and devotion carry with them, gained through obedience to the will of God, and the express declaration that they and all of God's servants must be respected in doing the works assigned them by

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<sup>1</sup>"Who Is to Decide?," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 27 (July 4, 1901), 420.

<sup>2</sup>(Untitled), Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 7 (February 13, 1873), 162.

<sup>3</sup>"The Organ and God's Law," Gospel Advocate, XXXIII, No. 18 (May 6, 1891), 276.

The Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> Any appointment, therefore, he insisted, is not to be construed as to divest any member of his or her individual and personal responsibility to do all in his power both in the work and worship of the church, and to have a continual watch-care for and over every other member of the body of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

It is proper that well-instructed, discreet, prudent members, of age and piety, should attend especially to the watch-care of the body, and if it is neglected appoint such to see to it. But this invests him or them with no official authority and divests no member of his full obligation and privilege to still watch, warn and exhort every other member of his duty and obligation.<sup>3</sup>

A logical question, arising out of such explanations as the one just given, came to Lipscomb: Does the ordaining or appointment of elders or any class of workers increase their responsibility to God? His answer was:

A man as a Christian ought to feel it his duty to do all he can to advance the cause of God, the interests of the church and of each member of the church; but humanity is weak, and do we so feel and act? When they are appointed they feel it is their special duty above that of others. That others look to them encourages them to act, and, acting for the church, they carry more weight and the erring are more willing to hear them.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Officers and Officialism in the Church of God," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 29 (July 18, 1867), 568.

<sup>2</sup>"Office and Officers," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 47 (November 30, 1871), 1100.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Queries," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 8 (February 22, 1906), 118.

Another question was, Has a bishop a right to resign?

Lipscomb tersely replied:

If the bishop's position is one that springs from work rather than election, he cannot get out of it save by ceasing to do the work. To cease to do any part of the Lord's work for which we are qualified is to rebel against God and reject his authority.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the controversial nature of some of the qualifications of a bishop, it is interesting to note that Lipscomb did not believe that an unmarried or childless man is barred, necessarily, from the eldership. The reason given was that he thought Paul gave the rule to apply to the usual state of men, not to the exceptions that might occur of one not marrying or having children.<sup>2</sup> Neither did he believe that being "apt to teach" necessarily involves public sermonizing. He declared: "Often he who in a quiet, unpretentious way instructs is the most effective teacher. An elder who rules the congregation without letting them feel or know he is ruling is the most effective ruler."<sup>3</sup> And for those whom he termed "impracticable complainers" who say no one is perfect, therefore no one can be an overseer, he had this comment: "Just as well say no one can be a Christian unless he is perfect in the qualities prescribed for a Christian."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Has A Bishop A Right to Resign?," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 43 (November 2, 1871), 1026.

<sup>2</sup>"Queries," Gospel Advocate, XLIV, No. 15 (April 10, 1902), 228.

<sup>3</sup>"Queries," Gospel Advocate, XXXII, No. 5 (January 29, 1890), 67.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



The Perfecting of the Saints

Lipscomb suggested that the true aim of every congregation should be to become self-sustaining in every department, educating and training its own members to do all the service of the Lord's house.<sup>1</sup> He argued that the first important work of the church, that which is the necessary foundation for success in every other work, is the perfection of the saints in their knowledge, walk and character. "But," he continued, "preaching or teaching never yet made a man a Christian. He may thus be taught how to become a Christian."<sup>2</sup>

The exercise of the congregation itself is what is needed to give and preserve life, not the hearing of preaching. Work that will enlist the feelings, that will develop the brotherly love and exhibit the true care of one for another, will do more to arouse to activity the religious feelings of individuals than all the sermons that were ever preached. A congregation that will do its own worship, singing, praying, exhorting, giving of thanks, observing the Lord's supper, engaging in the fellowship, and whose members will walk humbly and perfect their faith by true Christian works through the week, will keep themselves alive spiritually, grow in grace and edify itself and extend its borders in a degree far beyond what any preaching can do.<sup>3</sup>

And he was not at all sure that the church should spread itself abroad while it fails to exert a proper influence over its members at home. He believed that it does no good to bring members into the church when they are not in spirit and

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<sup>1</sup>"The Cause of Christ in Middle Tennessee," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 7 (February 13, 1873), 145.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 21 (May 22, 1873), 481.

<sup>3</sup>"Christian Labor -- No. 2," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 20 (May 16, 1867), 384.

life controlled by the laws of the church as given by the Holy Spirit. He suggested that if we would only kindle the fires of devotion at home, perfect the Christian character by inducing the members of the church to comply with the law of the Spirit, induce them to manifest that Spirit and exhibit the true Christian life in helping suffering humanity as Christ did, then the church will spread without so great an effort. "This," he wrote, "was the plan that Christ and the Holy Spirit adopted for spreading the gospel."<sup>1</sup> It is the task of the eldership to assist in this great work. As Lipscomb put it: "It is the duty of the eldership to know the will of God -- and to teach it to the congregation, and to say to them let us walk in this way, because it is God's way. And they should show them that it is God's way."<sup>2</sup>

Lipscomb's conclusion was that when the work of overseeing is needed in a congregation, those who are called upon to do the work must be from among those who have shown a fondness for this work. This taste or desire, combined with other moral qualities, prescribed by Holy writ, fits a man for the overseership.<sup>3</sup> And as to their appointment, he wrote:

We know no better way than the instruction given by the apostles to the disciples at Jerusalem. Look out among you, among the men active and consequently experienced, in church affairs, those who have been

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<sup>1</sup>"The Home Sanctifying Power of the Church," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 20 (May 16, 1867), 385.

<sup>2</sup>"Queries," Gospel Advocate, XXXII, No. 5 (January 29, 1890), 67.

<sup>3</sup>"The Church -- How It Works," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 16 (April 22, 1885), 241.

sufficiently long in the service to give confidence in their fidelity and steadfastness, and willingness to do the work, and appoint them to it. Sufficient age, experience, and service to satisfy all the qualifications and steadfastness of character is what is needed. More definite than this we cannot be.<sup>1</sup>

### The Ministry of Service

In like manner, the disposition to look after and relieve the suffering of the widows, the poor, the helpless, connected with the moral qualifications prescribed, fits one for the deaconship.<sup>2</sup> Here, as with the eldership, Lipscomb had some definite views, and many times stated them just as bluntly and positively. He regarded it as an absolute and positive duty of the church of Christ and individual members to help those unable to help themselves. He wrote:

Indeed, without a willingness, a determination to do this, at all times as demands may be made, all profession of the Christian religion is nothing, nay, worse than nothing -- it is an empty pretence that deceives both the pretender and the world to their utter ruin.<sup>3</sup>

The inspired historian penned the statement that the new converts in Jerusalem "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Lipscomb observed that the fellowship certainly represents the contribution for distribution to the poor.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Queries," Gospel Advocate, XXXII, Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"The Church -- How It Works," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>"Aid to Christians in Need -- How Shall It Be Administered?," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 11 (March 17, 1870), 249-254.

<sup>4</sup>"The Contribution," Gospel Advocate, XIV, No. 40 (October 10, 1872), 957-960.

"This is the idea of fellowship," he continued. "Those who have, deny themselves that those who have not may partake of their abundance -- whether the thing that is the subject of fellowship be money, knowledge or other favors."<sup>1</sup> The disciples in Jerusalem contributed money chiefly for the poor and needy, Paul commanded the Galatian churches and the church at Corinth to contribute each first day of the week with the specific object of helping the needy, and, Lipscomb suggested, "that same specific object every church should have before it continually."<sup>2</sup> It was Jesus who said "The poor ye have with you always." Lipscomb recognized it as a duty of the church to care for these poor. He declared:

Now a church that has no poor among its members methinks will hardly be recognized as Christ's church -- or in its neighborhood. The specific object of having a fund to take care of the widow and orphan, the poor and needy, and to assist those who minister to these ought never to be lost sight of by a church. . . . The needy and those helping the needy are objects of this fellowship.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Care of the Needy

But, in view of the fact that helping the needy is a duty so positive and sacred, Lipscomb felt that it must rest on some persons in particular and must have some regular order to secure its performance. So, when, in March of 1870, a letter came to him, initialed only, appealing for aid for a destitute brother, though not publishing the appeal for reasons

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

of policy, he used the occasion to set forth some of his ideas concerning the relieving of the needs of men.

Believing that what is left to every one is left to no one, and if the obligation to relieve the brother rested equally on all Christians he would never be relieved, he sought to determine upon whom the obligation did rest. He decided that it rested first, on his immediate relatives; secondly, on his own church; and thirdly, on the sister churches near him, who were acquainted with him and who had enjoyed his labor.<sup>1</sup>

He stated emphatically that no men or women should be permitted by their family or near relatives to appeal to the church when they are able to aid them, asserting:

God has made it the duty of these, first to exercise a care for their destitute relatives. He has stamped it upon our natures. He has fully recognized the same principle in that oft mis-applied and perverted passage of Paul to Timothy in which he says, "if any provide not for his own (destitute widows), especially those (widows) of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel."<sup>2</sup>

If the person in need either has no relatives who are able to help, or who being able, are unwilling to help, the congregation of which he is a member must take care of him. But Lipscomb warned that discretion must be used. He knew that every person will not see alike. One thinks a person needs help when another thinks differently. So, "a

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<sup>1</sup>"Aid to Christians in Need -- How Shall It Be Administered?," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

mere feeling or prejudice in a community that a parent or relative does not put a poor relative in as cozy condition as many think would be proper," he advised, "is not sufficient ground for interference. It is only the necessitous, unable to help themselves, that God's law provides for."<sup>1</sup> But when a person is able but unwilling to care for his poor relative, he should be told, gently and kindly, of his duty, and if he refuses to perform it and is a member of the church proper disciplinary measures should be taken in his behalf.<sup>2</sup> The church should then take upon itself the work of sustaining the destitute. That this is proper is a lesson continually impressed upon the churches in the New Testament, and Lipscomb wrote:

The Church which, when able to relieve its own poor, throws them upon the Christian brotherhood at large acts just as unworthily as the near relative does who refuses to aid the destitute widow of his own household, and throws her upon the church.<sup>3</sup>

When the disastrous Chicago fire occurred, Lipscomb was quick to point out the opportunity the church had to commend itself to the world. He wrote several articles urging the brotherhood to accept its responsibility. One of these articles contained the following:

There are we believe two congregations of Disciples in Chicago. They doubtless have shared the same

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<sup>1</sup>"Who Shall Aid the Widows?," Gospel Advocate, XIV, No. 9 (February 29, 1872), 215.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"Aid to Christians in Need -- How Shall It Be Administered?," loc. cit.



deprivation as others of their neighbors. The suffering of their own members should be relieved and that by their own brethren. The relief of the Christian poor ought to be regarded as much exclusively the privilege of the Church of Christ as the observance of the Lord's Supper is the exclusive privilege of the children of God. It ought to be as jealously guarded. Not only ought they to care for their own poor but for the poor of the world. . . .

. . . . .  
A hundred thousand dollars placed at the disposal of the Elders of the Church of Christ in Chicago and judiciously expended on the poor in the name of Christ will do more to Christianize Chicago and through her many-tongued tribes, the nations of Europe than an hundred times the amount expended in the ordinary manner of religious contributions and services. The amount can be raised too if the exertion is made promptly and earnestly by those who should make it.<sup>1</sup>

This appeal to the brotherhood generally to aid the poor was one, though, which Lipscomb believed should not be overworked. He admitted that there are cases in the New Testament in which such appeals were made, but he pointed out that those were cases involving whole churches in large sections of country which had been impoverished by wide spread desolation and famine, not just a few destitute members of a church. "In such cases and only in such cases are appeals for aid for the poor admissible now," he asserted, and gave as an example the appeal that was made in behalf of the destitute southern brethren after the Civil War:

The appeal was made, and from California and Maine the response came as it should. But when a church has a few cases which need help that church should not think of making an appeal to the brotherhood at large. Such appeals demoralize the Church

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<sup>1</sup>"What Ought to Be Done," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 41 (October 19, 1871), 973.

and the public sentiment of the brotherhood and almost always as they should, fail of their object but they leave the poor to suffer without help which they should not.<sup>1</sup>

He insisted that such public appeals are so common they are meaningless, not worth the paper and ink consumed in writing them. "They have become so," he wrote, "because of the growing feeling that they are mere efforts to throw burdens that ought to be borne at home, on others."<sup>2</sup>

Lipscomb also deplored another common way of making such an appeal, that is, the destitute traveling from congregation to congregation, traveling on the railroads, putting up at hotels and costing "somebody ten times as much to sustain him as it would were he at home where he ought to be."<sup>3</sup> He believed that brethren sin in encouraging such vagrancy. He warned that it makes the congregations think if they aid in sustaining the helpless of other congregations, other congregations should help sustain their needy, and thus the obligation to take care of their own destitute is weakened and destroyed and all order and rule for practical and certain help is swept away. Such cases, he thought,

ought to be sent home, that their own relatives "may learn to show piety at home," and if they have no relatives, that their own church may learn to obey the law of God and take care of them where their wants

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<sup>1</sup>"Aid to Christians in Need -- How Shall It Be Administered?," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"News from Coffee County," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 17 (April 27, 1876), 392.

<sup>3</sup>"Aid to Christians in Need -- How Shall It Be Administered?," loc. cit.

and character are known, and where they may be made comfortable on the least amount.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb contended that since the different churches are different families of God and the members of the church members of that family, there should be no hesitation as to their duty. He asserted:

The true members of a worthy family will never let their helpless brother or sister be a public beggar until they too become beggars -- until they all are impoverished. The begging of the needy members when the others are possessed of abundance will be the shame and disgrace of the whole Church.<sup>2</sup>

There are times, Lipscomb realized, of course, when a congregation is unable to meet the needs itself, but even then, he wrote,

it ought not to send out its helpless members as public beggars. The Church through its elders should make known its condition and wants to its neighbor congregations. They should give the requisite aid to the elders of the Church applying, that it may properly distribute to the needy of its own members.<sup>3</sup>

He believed, when it is necessary to seek aid from others, a messenger sent to those nearest and best acquainted with the needs and wants of the needy, is the best, most effective and Scriptural way for accomplishing the good.<sup>4</sup>

His conclusion was as follows:

Then, brethren, the duty is a sacred one, the failure to discharge the duty is a burning shame, to

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"A Good Suggestion," Gospel Advocate, XXV, No. 14 (April 4, 1883), 214.

members of a family first, who, when able, let their helpless relatives become a charge to the Church. It is equally a shame for a family of God to let its helpless members become public beggars. The congregation should support them if able, if not it should beg for its members. Let it send chosen messengers to its near sister congregations to show them its necessities and poverty and let them aid.<sup>1</sup>

He added, in a later issue,

the law of God is plain, that both in nature and grace, each family, as far as it is able should care for its own helpless members. God's plan is always the efficient and practical plan in effecting the object designed.<sup>2</sup>

### Shifting of Responsibility

Lipscomb was certain there is nothing that will do more to preserve the life, zeal, activity, and devotion of the church than to have every member fully alive to the responsibility that rests upon him in his peculiar work and position. And he felt that this responsibility is best kept alive by letting each one feel that God and the church look to him to do his whole duty. If, when duties arise, they are shifted to some one else, that person's sense of responsibility is destroyed and he is made to lose his interest in the work. The result is, inevitably, that the appointment of God loses its importance and sanctity in the eyes of him who fills the appointment and others.<sup>3</sup> "Shifting our responsibilities to others is very common among men. Christians ought not to do

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<sup>1</sup>"Aid to Christians in Need -- How Shall It Be Administered?," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"Justice," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 13 (March 31, 1870), 304.

<sup>3</sup>"Degrading the Appointments of God," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 4 (January 24, 1867), 66.

this ("for every man shall bear his own burden"), but they do."<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb often came to the aid of old and needy gospel preachers, so when a public appeal was made for Nathan W. Smith, who was old and in financial difficulties, for help, Lipscomb did what he could to further the appeal, knowing he was truly deserving of aid. But at the same time, he expressed a feeling of regret that the churches for whom Smith had labored in his manhood themselves did not regard it their special privilege to help him and care for him. He declared:

We will never be satisfied, while churches calling themselves Christian, use teachers and then when they are old and helpless, turn them off as public beggars. We are opposed to all minister's associations to support old and helpless preachers. There is but one right way for this to be done and that is for their own children in Christ to as tenderly care for them as faithful and loving children in the flesh will for a beloved earthly parent.<sup>2</sup>

In 1867 the Gospel Advocate published a discussion between Lipscomb and Thomas Munnell concerning missionary societies. The proposition was: "That man has authority to form institutions for the spread of the gospel, or through which he will serve God." Munnell first premised "that the Bible often gives us authority in general precepts rather than by specifying the particular plans for doing good," giving as an example Galatians 6:10, "As we have opportunity let us do

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<sup>1</sup>"Shifting Our Responsibilities," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 46 (November 14, 1901), 720.

<sup>2</sup>"Letter from N. W. Smith," Gospel Advocate, XXII, No. 19 (May 6, 1880), 291.

good unto all men." In seeking to establish his point he declared:

"Do good" is the general command. It is obeyed in a thousand ways not specified in the Bible. In ancient times they fed the poor by carrying them to each other's gates as Lazarus was. Now we take care of them by taxation and poorhouses. This passage is authority for both plans. It is certainly scriptural, in one sense, to lay a beggar at a rich man's gate, but our present system I regard as much superior to that.

Lipscomb was surprised at this, and bluntly asserted that Christians never carried their poor to the gates of the wicked rich, nor will a Christian church ever permit its poor to go to a poorhouse, nor will it raise its means to relieve its poor by taxation other than voluntary. He admitted that such a course as Munnell had suggested would doubtless much relieve Christians but declared:

Your Christian brother has a right to your bounties, to your comforts. Your sister's children have a right to the guardianship and shelter of your house, your protection. The idea that our duties are performed by providing poor houses, or even orphan's schools, into which they are placed as a separate off-cast and down-cast class, unworthy the association of the world, is a miserable, but a fearful deception Christians are practicing upon themselves. The gray-headed and worn-out servant of God in a poor house, to be neglected by one who oversees and feeds for hire. [sic] The homeless brother, and the orphan of your brother are entitled to the comfort, the cheer, the love and nurture of your own fireside. Brotherhood and fellowship among Christians is a miserable sham until it furnishes this. This is the fatal tendency of substitutes in religion for the church of God. Not so much money to hire some one else to care for the poor and afflicted, as the personal service of Christians themselves, in this work, is the great need. Personal service here alone can benefit the Christian. We may give money to hire this service done, and relieve ourselves from the work, just as we may hire a preacher to preach, pray and exhort for us, and relieve ourselves from worship, but we are not blessed in so



doing, we deprive ourselves of true spiritual labor, grow cold, formal and lifeless.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb, all his life, strongly supported the orphan home and the Bible school, and would have been pleased greatly to see in every county a school where destitute orphans could be taken and trained and a school in which the Bible would be taught to every child every day of the school. But at the same time it was his belief that

the great work of caring for orphans and teaching the Bible to the people must be done by churches and Christians in their private and personal walk in life. The schools and orphanages do their best and greatest work in impressing Christians with the conviction that each must do what he can along these lines in his life work here.<sup>2</sup>

In commenting upon James 1:27, he made the statement that personal service is needed to fitness for the joys of life eternal, and he affirmed that

all the organizations that remove this service from the individual are hurtful to both the helper and the helped. God's institution requires that service that benefits both the giver and receiver when faithfully administered.<sup>3</sup>

In June of 1873, Nashville was visited a second time with an epidemic of cholera, and after he had labored diligently in relieving the suffering, he made this observation:

We were more than ever satisfied that a simple church of God, as constituted of Heaven, is the most

<sup>1</sup>"Discussion -- Missionary Societies -- No. 8," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 21 (May 23, 1867), 401ff.

<sup>2</sup>"Some Plain Words," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 33 (August 16, 1906), 520-521.

<sup>3</sup>"Pure and undefiled Religion," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 1 (January 3, 1907), 9.

efficient organization for good the world ever saw -- if kept in proper working order. Other organizations have too much circumlocution, are too slow. They appoint their committeemen and agents after the danger is upon them, and find they have no adaptedness to the work, no natural fitness. The church always, to a greater or less extent, doing such a work, knows exactly whom to send, indeed finds the proper individuals at work before she sends, provided she does not ignore and smother out the working spirit of the church, by her officers who are very frequently unadapted to the work to which they are appointed. Frequently in a church the Lord has deacons, who are not the church's deacons. The church's deacons are those appointed of the church. The Lord's deacons and deaconesses are those who, in his name, do his work in taking care of the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison. These are true deacons and deaconesses of the Lord, chosen and approved by the Holy Spirit whether the church ever recognizes the selection or not.<sup>1</sup>

### The Ministry of the Word

As has been shown already, it was Lipscomb's belief that a man whose love of God has lead him to quietly and unostentatiously help the weak and struggling Christians to a better life, by growth, cultivation, experience, if endowed with some practical sense, will develop into an overseer of a congregation; another, whose love for God impels him to look after the widows and poor, to supply their wants, grows up into the kind of character fitted for deacons. In the same way, he believed, those whom this same love constrains to teach men the way of salvation in a quiet way, even though they never made a public speech, are the characters that develop into evangelists. In this connection he wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>"The Cholera and the Christian Religion," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 28 (July 17, 1873), 649.

All the eloquence and learning in the world without the unction for soul-saving will not make a successful evangelist, or one acceptable to God. With it well developed, combined with a strong practical sense and good moral character, no deficiency in speaking ability or lack of learning will disqualify for the work.<sup>1</sup>

But he warned that the desire to preach the gospel to the lost, developing itself in work, is the characteristic alone that can be developed into an evangelist. This desire must develop itself as an irrepressible longing of the soul into work. "We are inclined strongly to believe," he wrote, "no man should ever be put forward to teach who can be kept from it."<sup>2</sup> He felt that the man who is fit for the work will be found in his sphere, among his associates, and, according to his opportunity, using his talent to save the lost. And he knew that to those who faithfully use the talent committed it will be redoubled. The natural thing is for those who enter the work to gradually grow up into it. Hence he advised: "When one manifests a desire for work his brethren should encourage the desire by offering him opportunities, encouraging him and counseling him wisely. When he grows into a work demanding his time and labor, he should have the cheerful and hearty support of his congregation."<sup>3</sup> Lipscomb believed that every child of God has a right to perform any and every service connected with the church of God, limited

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<sup>1</sup>"The Church -- How It Works," Gospel Advocate, XXVII, No. 16 (April 22, 1885), 241.

<sup>2</sup>"How Can Churches Send Out Teachers?," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 3 (January 20, 1870), 70-72.

<sup>3</sup>"The Church -- How It Works," loc. cit.

only by his ability to do it decently and in order. He would encourage all to take part in the service and train himself for fitness in God's work. "The congregation is the school for educating and preparing men for any and all the work God has committed to his church."<sup>1</sup>

### Observing Scriptural Order

It has been noted in the preceding pages that, according to Ephesians 4:11, 12, the specific work of the church is to perfect the saints in knowledge, that they may be perfected in walk and character for relieving the needs of the poor and helpless, and edifying or building up the body of Christ, the church. The first important work of the church, then, Lipscomb believed, is the purifying and perfecting the saints. It is more important and stands before the preaching of the gospel, and preaching is vain without this work as a solid foundation to give it force. "A church that is not doing this first work may add to its numbers," he wrote, "but it does not make them true converts to Christ. And we doubt if the world and the church are not both injured by adding unconverted material to the already unhealthy material in the church."<sup>2</sup> The work second in importance and position, Lipscomb affirmed, is the work or ministry of service. It is more important than preaching because on it depends the value and

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<sup>1</sup>"A Self-Edifying and Self-Supporting Church," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 22 (May 31, 1906), 344-345.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers No. 4," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 26 (June 26, 1873), 601.

success of all preaching. He considered this matter carefully, and then delivered himself of this observation:

Now if a church is able only to support its poor or sustain a preacher to preach to itself or others, able to do one or the other but not both, with the Scriptures of truth before me, I am compelled to say it must sustain or help the poor -- the widow, the orphan, whether in or out of the church, if it wholly neglects the preacher.<sup>1</sup>

The third division of labor is to edify or build up the body of Christ, one means of doing which is preaching to or teaching the world. The true success of this teaching depends upon the churches faithfully performing these previous works.

It was plain to Lipscomb that there is a Scriptural order in the development of the church and its work, and he stressed the importance of observing that order. "Whenever this order of work is reversed or the relative importance perverted, the efficiency of the church is weakened and destroyed," he declared.<sup>2</sup> He felt that none could deny that the chief difficulty in the way of successful preaching to the world is found in the great lack of personal holiness in the members of the church and the neglect of the poor, the needy, the afflicted upon the part of the church as a body and of individual members of the church. He saw that the thing most needed to convert the world and to develop preaching or teaching talent is to prompt the church to the full work of the church in its divine order, and thus develop every

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

function of the body and properly nourish and exercise every member in its true work.<sup>1</sup> And he could not believe the way to accomplish this is by employing one man to do all the teaching and exhortation of the church. The work that the church is to do -- work that is essential to its own existence and the growth of its individual members -- is to present Christ as the Lord to be obeyed, the leader to be followed, and the Savior to be trusted to the lost of earth. That work is one of paramount obligation resting upon every individual follower of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The church, Lipscomb insisted, is nowhere told to preach the gospel -- Christians are told to preach. Though it is true that the church at Jerusalem was "scattered abroad" and "went everywhere preaching the word," the church did it through the scattered members, each one doing his duty to God and his fellow-man. The work of the church is to cultivate by its worship the spirit that will lead the individual Christian to go forth and preach the word.<sup>3</sup> He thought the church ought to be a center of worship and love that sends out influences in every direction to convert and save men. Every member of the church ought to be a worker to convert and save others and if it is content to worship in comfort and leave others to perish, it has fallen

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Christian Work," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 5 (February 3, 1876), 101-102.

<sup>3</sup>"The Work of A Church," Gospel Advocate, XLIV, No. 11 (March 13, 1902), 169.



from its first love and needs to be converted again that it may save its own members and others.<sup>1</sup> Lipscomb believed that without a burning, ardent desire to teach the word of God, no man will ever make an efficient or profitable teacher, no matter what his ability, intellectually or morally, may be, and the school -- the only school -- in which desire and capacity to teach, can be properly developed, is the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, in its proper work and worship.<sup>2</sup>

### Individual Responsibility

Furthermore, Lipscomb asserted that the obligation rests on each individual to take part in this work; it can never be delegated to another. It was here that he expressed his fear of the trend toward an "educated ministry." He believed that the tendency of a distinct class of clergy schooled from childhood up to the idea that they are the teachers of the church is to destroy a sense of personal obligation in others to do the work God requires at their hands, and to produce the impression that they can work by proxy. In other words, he felt that it induced a person to think that when he pays another to present the Gospel to the world, his duty is done -- his responsibility ends. He wrote:

Any influence that induces man to feel he can discharge his duties to God and his fellowmen as a Christian by the payment of money works incalculable

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<sup>1</sup>"Are We Christians?," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 16 (April 18, 1901), 248.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers No. 2.," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 23 (June 5, 1873), 529.

harm to the individual, the church and the world.<sup>1</sup>

He declared that private men, and women privately telling the story of the cross was the chief and efficient means of spreading the truth in ancient times and insisted that that kind of talent and labor should be encouraged now among both men and women.<sup>2</sup> The church may encourage them, may collect means and send to the help of those doing such work.<sup>3</sup> However, Lipscomb believed the individual's obligation is to his own immediate family first, towards his neighbor next. And, he said, "it is so with churches; they owe an obligation to teach those within their reach, their own immediate neighbors first, and let the truth spread as a leaven. The work near home is one in which all the members can participate to their own benefit and the good of their fellowmen."<sup>4</sup> "God," he added, "holds us responsible for the instruction of those nearest to us."<sup>5</sup> In this can be clearly seen Lipscomb's idea of a natural "growth" of the church. He stated:

The scriptural and effective way to spread the gospel is for every Christian to teach those he meets the way of life. Members living in different directions from a place of meeting, each interests some of his or her neighbors and induces them to meet and study the Scriptures, and each soon grows into a church,

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<sup>1</sup>"Preachers or Teachers No. 4.," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers No. 2.," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>"The Work of A Church," loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>"Christian Work," loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

each in turn to repeat the process; and so as a  
leaven the kingdom of God spreads among men.<sup>1</sup>

With his constant stress upon the necessity of observing the proper order of growth and development of the church and upon the individual's responsibility, it is not surprising when Lipscomb concludes that "it is vain that we attempt a hot-house growth of preaching talent, while the talent and disposition of the church for other work that God has placed before this work of preaching is almost wholly neglected and ignored."<sup>2</sup> In fact, Lipscomb, in correspondence with John T. Poe, made the statement that one of the reasons that led him to bring the Gospel Advocate again into being was that the tendency was to build up and rely upon human institutions, such as colleges, societies, etc., for making and sending out teachers of the Christian religion, to the depreciation of the churches and the true, self-made, efficient men, schooled and educated in the churches of God for this work. He stated then that

the Gospel Advocate was and is intended to counteract this tendency, and to restore a healthy sentiment for Scriptural knowledge, plain practical teaching, earnest, true, laboring teachers, and everyday piety, and working efficiency in, and dependence upon, the Church of God.<sup>3</sup>

In 1867 the Advocate contained an article by him on "Education and Christianity," in which he viewed with dis-

<sup>1</sup>"The Modern Sunday School," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 49 (December 6, 1906), 777.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers No. 4.," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>"Correspondence," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 9 (March 4, 1869), 208.

approval what he considered a sad departure of the disciples from the leading feature of the gospel -- the care of the poor. And he charged this departure chiefly to the influence of a new class of preachers that had come upon the stage. Whereas the older class, called from the plow, the carpenter's, shoemaker's or tailor's bench, and the blacksmith's anvil were perfectly at home among the same class, the younger preachers, he said

have usually in boyhood gone to college, associated with and formed the habits of the rich, learned to eat, lodge and dress with and like the rich, to feel an especial interest in the rich. Hence, when they have gone out to preach, they have naturally labored with and for the rich, visited them, conformed their preaching, the style of dress, worship and surroundings of the house of God to the caprices of the rich, and as a natural consequence have neglected the poor, and driven them from the worship of the church. . . . Our conviction is, that if the poor are reached, and the church of Christ is kept alive, pure and active, it must look to some other source for the training of workmen than colleges.<sup>1</sup>

He noted that some of the older churches had made studies in the matter, and the Presbyterian Church, which, he said, "has been more wedded to the system of systematic education of its ministers than any other church," announced that the money spent in aiding young men to the ministry, had been, of all the funds raised by the church, the most unprofitably spent; that it had brought into the ministry "much half-baked, inefficient material," mere dead wood that was a burden without profit to the church.<sup>2</sup> He also gave statements

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<sup>1</sup>"Education and Christianity," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 39 (September 26, 1867), 764.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers No. 5.," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 29 (July 24, 1873), 679.

from the Methodist and Congregational Churches which showed them to be in accord with this view that

courses in theological schools, and especially, the beneficiary plan of helping young men to educate themselves for the ministry is radically wrong and an injury to the church, crippling to its energies, and demoralizing to its piety, devotion and zeal. And that the strifes for place and position in the church among those ministers who have no talent, taste, or force to go out into the world, convert sinners, build up churches, were becoming a disgrace to the church and destroying the respect of the world for the church.<sup>1</sup>

And Lipscomb insisted:

You may say our Bible Colleges are not theological schools. The difference is less than the name. They do not teach thoroughly the system or demand good scholarship, will be found the chief difference.<sup>2</sup>

Anticipating the question from his readers, Lipscomb asked: "What remedy would we propose for the evil? We cannot dispense with the education. We must make it more thorough. We must divorce it from the immorality and especially the effeminating influences of college life."<sup>3</sup> He suggested, as the first prerequisite, the avoidance of so large a number of young men or women in one school, which would promote both morality and thorough scholarship and give the teacher ability to more directly reach the individual pupil. And in the second place he stipulated that the teacher should accept no fees for board or tuition, each young man being required to labor sufficiently to defray all expenses. He was satisfied

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<sup>1</sup>"Preachers or Teachers," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 30 (July 31, 1873), 697.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"Education and Christianity," loc. cit.

that any young man might do this and still advance as thoroughly and rapidly as any class of college students of that day. And with such a course, he felt, merit, energy, and industry would enjoy the advantages and reap the rewards.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly he regarded the Nashville Bible School, in the establishment of which he was chiefly instrumental, as an application of his "remedy."

His position was further explained when, in 1876, he made an approving notice of some of J. W. McGarvey's changed positions. He wrote:

More recently, on Bible Colleges, he expressed views showing a marked improvement on any we had heretofore seen from him. He denies they are for the purpose of making or educating preachers, but that they are for the purpose of teaching the young men who may attend the Bible, and if those who are preachers desire to attend they will not be excluded, but can receive the benefit of it. If those taught in after life see fit to preach, all well -- if to exercise their talent in other spheres, well. While we think Bible Colleges, including the one with which Bro. McGarvey is associated, is very far from this, practically, it is a correct idea, one we have ever advocated. All schools under Christian influence should daily teach the Bible in all its parts to all girls and boys who may attend, and then leave to the matured taste and ability of the individual to determine the appropriate field of labor. We have always maintained this as the ground, too, of our opposition to Bible Colleges. We believe the selecting a young man or middle-aged man, and giving him a special training to qualify him to preach is hurtful both to him and others in various ways, and disqualifies him in some most essential particulars for the work of preaching.

When the Bible is thoroughly taught as a necessary study to every student of Kentucky University in theory and practice, as arithmetic and grammar are

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.



taught, can it justly lay claim to be a Christian school, and only then.<sup>1</sup>

Very early in his editorial career, Lipscomb actively encouraged the building up of good, practical, thorough Christian schools in every county, town, and neighborhood in the land. He stated that the Gospel Advocate and its editor believed it of an hundred fold more importance to the people and the cause of God to have these than a few overgrown, richly endowed and unwieldy colleges and universities for the wealthy few.<sup>2</sup> When prospects were good, he, with J. W. Harding, led in the establishment of the Bible School in Nashville. After ten years of successful operation, Harding went to Bowling Green, Kentucky, to begin a similar school there. At that time Lipscomb commented:

It has never been our idea to build up a school to monopolize the teaching of the Bible, but one of our aims has been to excite others to do likewise. We would be glad to see a school in which the Bible is taught to every pupil in every church in the land; indeed, we do not think children can be reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord at home or at school without daily instruction in the word of God. Parents sin against the souls of their children when they let them live in families or in schools where they are not daily taught the Scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

A little over a year later he again declared that he had no desire for a very large school; that he had rather see a dozen moderate-sized schools distributed through the country

<sup>1</sup>"Inconsistencies in Our Teachings," Gospel Advocate, XVIII, No. 4 (January 27, 1876), 78-80.

<sup>2</sup>"New Advertisements," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 27 (July 8, 1869), 640.

<sup>3</sup>"Nashville Bible School," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 23 (June 6, 1901), 361.

than one large, overgrown one. Yet he recognized that

Christian young men and women desire and should study the higher branches of learning. They need to be kept under Bible influences and to be taught the Bible while studying these higher branches.

Nashville is an educational center, the educational center of the Southern States. A school of a higher order should be kept here in which the Bible is taught.<sup>1</sup>

### Building Up the Body of Christ

With his evident friendship for Christian education, he yet insisted that the work of the church is to teach the Bible to the world -- especially to the younger members of the church and the children connected with the families of the church -- and the effective means of instructing and training children at this day is, he wrote, through schools.<sup>2</sup> He believed that in the present order of affairs schools are a necessity. The question with him was, Who shall control the schools and educate the children?

Unpopular as the idea is, we must declare our conviction that the day that civil government undertook to furnish public schools, was an evil day for the Church of Christ, and the religious well-being of the world. The Church herself should educate her own children; should educate them for fidelity to her Lord and activity in her own service. To surrender the education of her children to any other power is to prove false and recreant to her most sacred trust.<sup>3</sup>

If the State educates, he said, it will educate for its own service. If sectarians educate, they will make sectarians.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Bible School," Gospel Advocate, XLIV, No. 48 (November 27, 1902), 761.

<sup>2</sup>"Preachers or Teachers," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 38 (September 25, 1873), 908.

<sup>3</sup>"Schools By State Authority," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 45 (November 18, 1869), 1068

Christians must train the young if they would make Christians.<sup>1</sup>

He added:

We believe it the duty of every church to provide a teacher for the children. Educate them, that in educating them they may be taught the Christian religion. All the children then should be educated and in educating them, the daily study of the Bible in all of its parts should be a main desideratum with every pupil.

Educate them, as best you can, to understand and appreciate and use language, and then impress each one -- not that he is at liberty to serve the State, or his own selfish interest and ambition, but must serve God and the church with his talent, and learning. Leave each one then to follow the bent of his own mind in what manner he will serve the church.<sup>2</sup>

He admitted that he had but little faith in the church making earnest and faithful Christians until it takes the children and teaches them, not an hour one day in the week, but every day of the week. The church that gives up the education of the children to others will, he had no doubt, have faithless members.<sup>3</sup>

Preaching is right, teaching the children the Bible at meeting on Sunday is right. The church through its eldership ought to see that both are done, and done in accordance with the provisions of the word of God. God's church, as he gave it, is fully competent to all God's work on earth. A work that it cannot do, and do better than any and all other institutions of earth can do, is not of God. Teach the children by all means the word of God and do not destroy their respect for that word, by showing you think men's institutions more effective for good than God's, as set forth in his word.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Preachers or Teachers," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"Christian Schools," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 14 (April 14, 1870), 354.

<sup>4</sup>"Queries," Gospel Advocate, XXII, No. 4 (January 22, 1880), 56.

Here as everywhere, there must be no shifting of responsibility. The parent must learn that he must train his children for God, and not rely on the preacher to do it; churches must learn that they must supply teaching and instruction adapted to the condition and wants of the children, and that they must train all that they can reach for immortality.<sup>1</sup> The church, Lipscomb wrote, can not be brought to her true position and work except by her children resolutely refusing to commit her work to any other body.<sup>2</sup>

With his emphasis upon individual responsibility and personal work in order to grow and develop as Christians should, Lipscomb was asked if every church ought to have its own preacher. He replied:

We answer emphatically, every congregation should have its own Preacher. Ought to use him at home and send him abroad as he is needed. Then Brethren, go to work and raise you up a Preacher, or a dozen of them. It is a poor, sickly Church that exists for five years and cannot in that time, inspire a single one of its children with faith and devotion enough to induce him to preach. . . . We say, then, to every Church in the land, raise you a Preacher, inspire him with a true Preacher's devotion, train him, educate him in the Lord, work him, feed him.<sup>3</sup>

#### Relationship of Teacher and Taught

The relationship of the teacher to the taught came in for its share of the discussion. Lipscomb wrote a great deal

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<sup>1</sup>"Correspondence," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 41 (October 10, 1867), 812.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XI, No. 16 (April 22, 1869), 373.

<sup>3</sup>"Ought Every Church To Have Its Own Preacher?," Gospel Advocate, VIII, No. 3 (January 16, 1866), 42.

about this. He advised teachers to share patiently and uncomplainingly the deprivations and poverty of those whom they teach,<sup>1</sup> often emphatically stating that "the preacher who will not preach as he is able, pay or no pay, is not fit to preach at all," but being ever careful to couple with this statement his conviction "that the church that would permit an humble and faithful preacher to be hindered in this labor for lack of support or let him suffer while laboring, is unworthy the name of a church of Christ."<sup>2</sup> And that which came in for even severer condemnation from Lipscomb was for those whom these teachers have taught in poverty to neglect them for some more showy persons when they become prosperous.

Children sometimes, when they become rich and fashionable, neglect and cast off their flesh and blood parents.

But a church thus acting can never enjoy the favor of God, can never be prosperous, can never benefit the community, nor will it ever command the respect of just thinking persons.<sup>3</sup>

He did not believe it either Christian or wise for a young man to settle down to cater to an old and wealthy congregation. He felt it would pervert his work as a preacher and mar his usefulness as a servant of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> In such cases, he warned, the preacher is quite frequently over anxious to please and is unmanned by his fear of displeasing.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Way to Destroy the Cause and the Churches of God," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 2 (January 14, 1869), 45.

<sup>2</sup>"Preaching to the Poor," Gospel Advocate, XV, No. 22 (May 29, 1873), 511.

<sup>3</sup>"The Way to Destroy the Cause and the Churches of God," loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>"Demand for Preachers," Gospel Advocate, XLVIII, No. 30 (July 26, 1906), 473.

Knowing that he is hired for a limited time, possessing no feeling of identity and sympathy with the congregation, he is unsettled and continually looking around for a new home. No man, Lipscomb believed, under such circumstances, could be a true workman, nor make an honest, earnest effort.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, he thought an evangelist should not be a permanent teacher in a church with scriptural bishops or elders. He recognized that

some most excellent elders or bishops fail themselves to be competent laborers in word and doctrine. It is their duty when not able to fully teach, to secure the needed teaching from others. It is right for them to call in the services of an evangelist who is capable of rendering the needed teaching. But this should only be temporary.<sup>2</sup>

He was always opposed to what is called "the Pastor system" -- that is, one man doing all the teaching, thanksgiving, and praying in a congregation. He believed the preacher's labor should be directed to the end of developing, using, and directing the talents of the congregation; that he should so teach the congregation that they will not be dependent upon him or any one or two persons to conduct the worship and teach sinners the way of life.<sup>3</sup> While granting to preachers the right to labor wherever the opportunity presented itself to preach the gospel and establish and build up churches, Lipscomb

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<sup>1</sup>"Teachers -- Their Relationship to the Taught," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 47 (November 25, 1869), 1105.

<sup>2</sup>"Queries on Constitution and Order of Churches," Gospel Advocate, XXIV, No. 24 (June 15, 1882), 372.

<sup>3</sup>"Preachers and Their Work," Gospel Advocate, XLIII, No. 15 (April 11, 1901), 232.



advised that he should have a home for his family and should be with and care for that family, suggesting that

there is not a county in Tennessee in which the most missionary spirit may not find ample opportunity to preach to those who know not the truth. . . . A man loses the best of his influence when he lives in one place and labors at other places. The influence of his home life ought to be his best influence.<sup>1</sup>

### Co-operation of Churches

The question of church co-operation in the matter of sustaining preachers and spreading the gospel was a disturbing one in Lipscomb's day. He gave a great deal of his attention to this and, inasmuch as the principles involved apply to other scriptural work of churches, it is proper to give it its place here. An early statement of Lipscomb's is significant:

Two congregations, acting in accordance with his law, must operate and co-operate as harmoniously as do any two of the heavenly bodies in their movements and influences, and all the churches in the universe, acting by the same laws, must operate and co-operate as harmoniously in working out their final glorious destiny, as do the bodies of the planetary system in the universe of God. There is no need of any extra helps to cause the forces of the physical world to act in perfect harmony and order, because they all act in accordance with the law of God. Just so there is no need of any efforts at co-operation between the churches of God. If they will only act in accordance with his will -- direct their actions by his law -- co-operation and harmony must grow out of this as perfect and true as God can make it. His law was so framed as to secure perfect co-operation between every soul and every church obeying it. The moment any interference with this law, by addition to, or subtraction from the appointments of God occurs, then God's harmony, order and unity are broken, and man's confusion, strife and weakness will be substituted

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<sup>1</sup>"Demand for Preachers," loc. cit.

for it.

All efforts to effect co-operation have a tendency to destroy it. Let the supreme object be to submit to God's law, and to comply heartily with it in all its parts, and harmony, perfect and complete, co-operation as full and hearty as God would have it, or can make it, will be the result.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb insisted that the first essential to church co-operation is the existence of churches -- distinct, separate, equal and independent churches (independent so far as other churches and organizations are concerned). In addition, they must be working churches. "There can be no working together of churches without churches themselves working," he wrote. "Churches that do not operate cannot co-operate."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Lipscomb regarded as the first and most important item in the work of sending the gospel to a people the finding of a man determined to carry it -- a man whose heart is in the work and who cannot be deterred from it by any ordinary difficulty. When the man is found, he added, it is proper for him to communicate his determination to the elders and members of his church to seek to interest them with him in the work and to write letters or to send messengers to other churches to enlist their help if it is needed.<sup>3</sup> "Individual purpose and effort leading the way, seconded by congregation or congregations is heaven's approved order," Lipscomb

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<sup>1</sup>"Romish Strength and Increase," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 31 (August 5, 1869), 721-723.

<sup>2</sup>"Co-operation," Gospel Advocate, XXIV, No. 45 (November 9, 1882), 708-709.

<sup>3</sup>"God Sends Delusions," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 33 (August 13, 1884), 518.

wrote.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps as complete and concise a statement as Lipscomb ever made on this question was at the request of those who had met in Chattanooga in 1890 for the purpose before mentioned of establishing a state missionary society. He wrote a paper and presented it to the group. It read:

The churches of Christ are the institutions ordained by divine wisdom for perfecting the saints and converting the world. No other organization is needed or permissible. No arrangement or association of churches or individuals is allowable that overrides the churches, or interferes with the work committed to the churches or that transfers to any one church or society what was committed to each and all. No association of churches or individuals is permissible that presents an organization separate and distinct from the churches of Christ. To do so is to impugn the wisdom of God and to supersede his appointments with inventions of man.

Churches may co-operate in spreading the gospel, 1st, By two or more churches, each communicating with an evangelist when he is in a distant destitute field, and supplying his wants and necessities. Eph. vi:20, 21, Phil. iv:15. 2nd, Two or more churches may co-operate in sustaining an evangelist, by conferring with each other through a messenger and each doing a part in the work. (This is an inference but a legitimate one from the apostles sending messengers to other churches in stirring up to bounty and in carrying that bounty to the poor saints.) A messenger differs from a delegate in that a delegate has powers delegated him to confer, organize, advise and determine for the church. This is practical legislation as to what and how the churches shall do. A messenger delivers what the church has decided and directs him, receives in turn a message and returns it. Messengers cannot confer, devise or commend.

When a church sees a work to be done and is not able to do it, it may send a messenger to another church or churches and ask aid in that work, the other churches can respond as to what each can do, and this is the end of co-operation in that line. There can be no self-perpetuating body save the churches of Christ to collect and disburse funds or direct preachers.

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<sup>1</sup>"Brother Wilmeth's Article Again," Gospel Advocate, XIII, No. 20 (May 18, 1871), 462.

That is the work committed by God to the churches themselves and they cannot delegate the work to others. It is legitimate and proper for an individual or a church that sees churches neglecting their duty or that sees destitute fields that need help to go or send to the churches and stir them up to activity and point them to the fields needing the help. When he stirs them up to their duty and points to the fields, it is right for them to send help to aid the preacher at work. To delegate others to disburse the means and direct the labor for the churches is wrong.

It is legitimate to send a messenger to a church and direct it to a specific work, and secure the aid of all the churches needed to effect that specific work and no more. This creates and leaves no organization separate from the church of God, and requires no delegated body. A church can co-operate in a specific work and in supporting individuals; not in delegating power to oversee and direct general work for unlimited time. One church -- as, the Chattanooga church -- may send out a messenger to provoke to activity and co-operation all the churches in the land, but such co-operation must be limited to that kind and character of work that can be done without organization, save that of the churches themselves. If a wide field of destitution is found, and several preachers to be sustained, to avoid unscriptural organizations and to bring the work as close to the supporters as possible, after getting two or more churches to sustain one man, this may be repeated with another and another group of churches, indefinitely. These churches, as matter of fact, will give much more when brought into direct contact with the work than when giving to a committee to spend they know not where nor how. Then the care of the mission will give to the churches exercise, the labor and familiarity with the work that are needed to more and more develop this disposition and desire to give.<sup>1</sup>

The chief reason Lipscomb gave for his opposition to one church receiving and directing the means given by other churches was that it takes the work out of the hands of those to whom God has committed it and gives it to others. He contended:

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<sup>1</sup>"How Churches May Scripturally Co-operate," Gospel Advocate, XXXII, No. 43 (October 22, 1890), 678-679.

God commits work to his churches and his children, not because he needs the help of these, but because doing the work will strengthen and build up these and give spiritual growth and activity to the churches and Christians. Each church should collect, control, and direct its own means, do what it can in preaching and having preaching done to the world. They need this for their own growth and spirituality. A Christian cannot live and grow without working to save others. Each needs personal work in teaching and saving others to develop and save himself. Churches need the same exercise in working to save others to develop their own growth and activity.<sup>1</sup>

This is the way Lipscomb understood the primitive church to work and grow and he believed that it was not just the wisest procedure to take but the one that has the approval of God. He believed that the way he had outlined was the way the churches sustained Paul and relieved the wants of the suffering by the famine in Judea. Firmly, he added:

While I do not contend that all the minutia of this work was prohibitory of other ways of doing it, I do contend most earnestly that the principle of keeping the disbursement of its means, the work of every church, immediately under its own control, directly in its own hands, and the teacher and the members sustaining him in immediate and close contact, embodies an element of divine wisdom too clearly revealed and carefully guarded to be set aside, without rejecting divine authority and setting aside divine wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Church Work," Gospel Advocate, XLIX, No. 35 (August 29, 1907), 550.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

For David Lipscomb the true work of the Christian religion is to make man like Jesus. He believed sincerely that a faultless compliance with the teachings of the New Testament would produce the exact model of Jesus Christ in thought and feeling, in act and purpose. But he readily admitted that man in his frailty and weakness falls short of perfect obedience and that he always will in the present world of sinful surroundings under the rule of an evil spirit. He suggested that

all human beings are actuated by more or less of selfishness, in all we do and say. There is more or less of a lack of candor, more or less of dishonesty, even to ourselves, in every heart. To work this out, to eradicate it, to fit us for the companionship of God, is the life work of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

For him the church of God is a school into which man is called to practice the laws that will make him Christ-like. By continued practice, by repeated efforts in this walk he approximates the true character in this world; then when he who faithfully practices this walk on earth casts off the infirmities of mortality and is no longer subject to the temptations of the wicked one, he will be like the Son of God for he "shall see him as he is." "The great end of religion,"

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<sup>1</sup>"Innovations," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 12 (March 19, 1884), 183.



Lipscomb affirmed, "is to make us like Christ practically, in our feelings and actions toward God and man."<sup>1</sup>

As was noted earlier, Lipscomb regarded the Roman Catholic Church as the most highly developed system of the forces working in the world in opposition to God under the principle of Paul's "man of sin," and he continually urged that the only thing that can and will restrain the spread of Romanism and any other "ism" that is opposed to God and to the true interest of humanity is the church founded by God,

working through faithful, true, devout members, who have implicit confidence in the Church and its God appointed instrumentalities, who realize that in using these instrumentalities in their proper place, however simple, they are bringing to bear the fullness of God's wisdom and strength in the accomplishment of his work; that neither he nor his Church needs help from human devices and schemes; that the bringing in these brings human weakness, human frailty, human confusion and human strife.<sup>2</sup>

So, when, in 1884, it became rather widely known that a preacher of the gospel had left the movement of the Disciples to unite with a Church which was more congenial to his "enlarged perceptions," Lipscomb used the occasion to teach his readers something more about the church of Christ. He wrote:

The mission of the church of Christ is to restore the law of God as the only authority in religion, the church of God in its organization, work, and worship, just as God gave it, as the only means of converting the world and perfecting

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<sup>1</sup>"The True Object of Religion," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 47 (December 1, 1870), 1113.

<sup>2</sup>"Romish Strength and Increase," Gospel Advocate, XI, No. 27 (July 8, 1869), 629-631.

Christians, and to bring the lives of the children of God up to the pattern of excellence that God has given for man. A man who does not believe in the sufficiency of God's provisions for accomplishing these ends, cannot work for these ends, and is a hindrance instead of a help to the church of Christ. He must not only believe that God's appointments are sufficient to all good to the world, but he must believe that all human additions and amendments grow out of sacrilegious assumptions upon the part of man, and that they separate man from God, so weaken the influence of God in the world, corrupt his holy religion and despoil it of its efficacy to save.

A man that cannot accept God's appointments as the perfect and only source of all good to man, cannot work in the true church of God, and he honors his head and heart by saying so and leaving it.<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb always insisted that no man ever was a zealous servant of any human institution, religious or otherwise, and at the same time a zealous and self-sacrificing child of God; hence, he was persuaded that the kingdom of God can never prosper and grow as it should until its children give their undivided fealty and service to it. "When its prosperity becomes their happiness, its failure their distress, its honor their joy and its disgrace their shame, it will prosper," he wrote. "Never until this is the case."<sup>2</sup>

His conclusion was that

the Church, then, founded of God, with its members withdrawn in their affections, feelings, service from every other institution, eschewing all other devices, earnestly, faithfully, devotedly trusting and using God's appointments for the spread of His Kingdom, will present the fullness of God's wisdom, strength and power for the salvation of the world. God himself

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<sup>1</sup>"A Sensible Move," Gospel Advocate, XXVI, No. 32 (August 6, 1884), 502.

<sup>2</sup>"Correspondence with Bro. Mulliniks," Gospel Advocate, XII, No. 13 (April 7, 1870), 326.

must fail, his strong arm be palsied, and his throne totter to its overthrow, before a church so working, so presenting itself, that God works in it to will and to do of his own good pleasure can fail to spread and benefit the world. This Church will spread, extend its power, bless and save. Through this confiding and submissive confidence in and use of God's appointments, God's wisdom, strength and power becomes ours, and this church, thus equipped and panoplied, is a vine of God's own planting, and will be nurtured and cherished by him, while every other institution not planted of God will be destroyed. "Every plant that my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."<sup>1</sup>

Lipscomb's simple, yet, magnificent, faith -- a faith that was maintained unswerving and unshaken through many years of toil and opposition -- is well expressed in the following words:

Our faith is of that character, that we believe if God has proposed to convert the world through the agency of the church, although I may fail to see how he will do it, nevertheless he is able to remove the difficulties, and my duty is in simple, trusting faith to do what he has commanded me and leave the result with him. More than this is presumption on man's part.<sup>2</sup>

It may well be that more such faith is the world's greatest need at this present hour!

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<sup>1</sup>"Romish Strength and Increase," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>"Discussion -- Missionary Societies -- No. 2," Gospel Advocate, IX, No. 12 (March 21, 1867), 229-231.

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